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SO RUNS THE WORLD AWAY

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VOL. II.

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AND CHARING CROSS.

SO RUNS THE WORLD  
AWAY.

BY MRS. A. C. STEELE,  
AUTHOR OF "GARDENHURST."

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*



VOL. II.

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# SO RUNS THE WORLD AWAY.

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## CHAPTER I.

“ GOOD FORM.”

“ I’VE given him brandy, and ’ave brought him round,” Captain Mowbray’s valet whispered into his master’s ear as the latter sat at table presiding over a *recherché* little dinner, and surrounded by friends; “ and now what’s to be done ?”

“ Done ! Why, bring him in here, to be sure. Tell him that I am dining, and shall be very glad to see him.”

“ I don’t think he can move yet ; and besides, sir, consider his ’abiliments.”

"D—— the habiliments. Show him in at once."

The valet returned to the dressing-room, where he had left Douglas extended on a sofa.

"Master's at dinner, and wishes to see you. He won't take no denial, but begs you'll come and dine with him."

"My good fellow, consider my appearance," Douglas remonstrated.

"Yes, it's hawful," the valet owned, candidly; "but master's wonderful obstinate when he has got a few glasses of champagne on board. What have you got in that bundle there?"

The bundle contained a clean cotton suit of American manufacture, and two coarse shirts made of jute.

"Roughish, but clean," Douglas said, complacently. "If I could get a bath and a shave I shouldn't feel such a wretch."

The brandy and biscuits, which the servant had wisely administered in small

quantities, had marvellously restored his strength. He almost smiled as he watched the town-bred domestic's look of intense wonder at the quaint foreign cut of the striped jacket and pantaloons.

“Zebras must be very fashionable in his parts,” the valet thought. “What on earth will Lord Clairveaux and Mr. Percy de Smith say to this make-up? I shall watch his first entry; I wouldn’t miss it on any account.”

He paid, however, every attention to Douglas’s requirements, and when the latter emerged from the dressing-room—clean-shaven, and bright with the comfort of his ablutions—he looked very different from the haggard-faced wretch who was reeling down Regent Street an hour since, although, as the valet said, “His rig-out was still most remarkable.”

“What name am I to say?” the latter asked as they neared the dining-room door.

“Mr. Douglas.”

And Mr. Douglas was accordingly announced, and walked into the room with as much quiet ease as if he had been an expected guest.

Whatever faults Thurstan Mowbray possessed (and he had many) he was perfectly free from all the little meannesses that conduce to form what is generally defined as a "snob." He did not know what false shame was. He never affected to be other than he was, and he had none of that disagreeable consciousness of manner which frequently afflicts a certain class of young Englishmen.

You may meet with this class in our best society. They appertain to our *corps d'élite*. They may even be the scions of noble races, but they are more generally of parvenu descent. Their coats are perfect; their hats and boots marvels of taste. They may be courteous in manner and refined in appearance, but the taint of consciousness clings to them like a fate. They cannot forget

how well their clothes fit. A gentle superciliousness never fails to mark the line between them and those less favoured sons of fortune who are pronounced by them to be “in a bad set.”

They imagine that constraint of manner indicates gentle breeding ; that an affectation of haughtiness infers pride of race. They would deem their reputations ruined if they were seen carrying paper parcels in a fashionable locality, and would shudder at the notion of helping an old woman over a crossing. Lassitude is their strength, and eye-glasses are their most formidable weapons.

Such as these miss the true secret of exclusiveness—the exclusiveness of a vigorous intellect, of the shy beautiful thoughts which evolve round a cultured mind close as unblown rose petals round the bud’s calyx.

The blossom will not yield its ripe fragrance to blustering winds or cold kissing

frost, but expands its sweet face to the warm blessing of the sun ; and the innately noble turn as instinctively from coarseness or arrogance, not because the offender wears a shabby hat or a country-made coat, but because he jars against the subtle delicacy of a refined mind ; because if he visited the whole peerage, and held commissions in all three regiments of Guards, he would still fail to be in sympathy with the aristocracy of intellect.

There is another species of refinement, not born of mental sensitiveness, but inherited from many generations of gentle blood. Thurstan Mowbray possessed neither genius nor grand moral qualities, but his manner had the easy grace of one who knew that a Mowbray's claim to the title of gentleman had been indisputable for centuries. De Smith, backed as he was by the colossal wealth of his deceased grandfather, the once eminent tea merchant, might shudder at the name of trade, and largely

affect the company of lords and honourables ; but Mowbray of Auriel (ruined, dismantled Auriel had never known any owner but a Mowbray) was quite unshackled by the fetters self-conscious vanity imposes on itself. If he had been forced to remodel the old family motto, “*Sans tache*,” he would probably have imitated the noble arrogance of the Rohans, and written “*Mowbray Je Suis.*” “*A Mowbray is as much as a man, and more than a prince,*” was a favourite sentiment of Thurstan’s father. Thurstan himself never gave the subject a thought ; the great charm of his courtesy was its unconsciousness. The certain sign of his nobility of race was his forgetfulness of his rank and station.

Captain Mowbray rose from his seat with outstretched hand as Douglas entered, and welcomed him cordially. In the more romantic realms of novel-land, Thurstan would have either been silent from emotion, or have greeted his old friend and preserver

“**SO EYES THE WORLD AWAY.**

in a high-flown strain of eloquence creditable alike to his heart and his elocutionary teacher ; but Thurstan was no hero, only a Dragoon, whose dinner was interrupted by his friend's advent.

“ I am very glad, indeed, to see you, Douglas. Have some fish ? No ! well then have some lamb. James, bring Moselle for Mr. Douglas. Clairveaux—De Smith—Mountjoy—Carden, this is Robert Douglas, a great friend of mine. Douglas, that is Lord Clairveaux ; that handsome fellow there is Mountjoy ; the fellow to the right is De Smith ; and the other is Carden.”

Thurstan's guests were externally too well bred to exhibit any signs of wonder at the strange addition to their party ; they never glanced at the curious garb, nor did they suffer the temporary interruption to check their conversation, but insensibly it took for a while a different tone ; from familiar badinage they passed to subjects of

more general interest. One was with them who was not of them, and poor De Smith, who feeling that he might legitimately enjoy himself in such society as Clairveaux's and Carden's, had hitherto indulged himself with a relaxation of his habitual dignity of manner, was frozen again into stiffness by the apparition of the stranger who was, too evidently, not “good form.”

The effort, however, to discourse of politics and literature soon flagged. Mountjoy had heard the Premier's last *bon mot*, and repeated it backwards in such fashion that it lost its point. Carden sometimes read the political leaders in “Bell's Life,” and had studied women through the medium of the better class of casinos and the pages of the “Saturday Review.” De Smith, who with all his folly of affectation was clever, knew something of Whyte-Melville's last novel. (The only novels for gentlemen, by Jove.) Clairveaux had seen the Grand Prix run this year, and had

decided but irrelevant opinions to offer concerning the foreign policy of Napoleon III., but this mental store was soon exhausted, and involuntarily the conversation glided back into its old familiar channel.

“Have you seen Beauville lately?” De Smith asked of Lord Clairveaux.

“No; what’s wrong with him? is he up a tree?”

“Yes.”

“Is it Jews?” Lord Clairveaux cracked a walnut somewhat viciously, as if he imaged a crushed Hebrew between the silver pincers.

“Worse than that.”

“The last settling day at Tattersall’s, perhaps.”

“Worse still. Fancy something more troublesome than a Jew, more expensive than a horse.”

“You must mean a wife,” Clairveaux broke in. “I hope she’s pretty; if a man is going to immolate himself on the altar of

conjugality he might just as well be unselfish and consult his friends' taste as well as his own."

"I think all women are bores," Mountjoy observed, getting pathetic over his potations. "They never know how to follow that excellent advice which some fellow or other gave to another fellow—‘to leave one alone.’"

In all her Majesty's brigade of Butterflies there was no prettier man than Gerald Mountjoy. I use the word "pretty" advisedly; he had pretty curling hair, silky as an infant's, pretty little hands, lovely little feet, and a gentle little voice. A trainer once described him as having been "foaled in Bond Street, trained in Rotten Row, and run at St. James's."

He was a suffering Adonis, generally afflicted by over much attention from the various queens of beauty, who still haunt the world clad in little more than the old original cestus.

"Mowbray doesn't agree with you," De Smith observed, glancing at the handsome face of his host.

"Ask him if he feels bored by 'The Merton.' "

Douglas shot a quick glance from under his shaggy brows at the speaker. "I have been away so long from England," he said, in his low rich voice. "Will you enlighten as to who 'The Merton' is."

De Smith slightly raised his eyebrows, and without looking at Douglas made answer—

"You should ask Mowbray."

"Is she beautiful still?" Douglas persisted.

"She isn't my style," Mountjoy said lazily.

"No; because you're both too beautiful," mocked Clairveaux. "You never find two peacocks admiring each other's plumage."

"I think Lady Di. is wonderfully well preserved," De Smith remarked kindly.

He himself was not a favourite of the lady's, and he took malicious satisfaction in irritating Mowbray, who had the reputation of being more successful.

“Lady Diana Merton,” the latter said, hotly, “is the loveliest woman I have ever seen—pass the wine, Carden.”

“Is she *sans reproche*?” Douglas asked of Clairveaux, who was sitting next him.

“You evidently HAVE been a very long time away from London,” the latter murmured, looking askance at Mowbray; “but tell me something of your own country. I am thinking of visiting America shortly. I shall just run over with my yacht, you know; spend a month there, and then come back and write a book about their morals, politics, and that sort of thing.”

“I see that my peculiar costume (for the incongruity of which I ought to have apologised before) has misled you,” Douglas said smiling. “I am an English man. I did not even get these clothes in

America ; I purchased them of a pedlar at the Cape."

"Are you talking about the Cape?" Captain Mowbray asked with a flash in his brown eyes. "I should like to tell you something that once happened to me there."

"You had better not," Douglas said quietly. "Autobiographical anecdotes try the patience of the best of friends."

"Friends!" echoed Thurstan, a little scornfully ; "which of my friends would do for me what a stranger did on the occasion to which I refer ? Clairveaux would lend me a cigar if my case was empty, and, as he said just now, wouldn't mind taking one's wife off one's hands for a little while (providing she suited his taste) ; Carden if he saw me have a bad fall in the hunting-field would help me up, unless he had taken odds on the event and had two ponies dependent on my lying under my horse's heels for

five minutes longer ; Mountjoy would do anything for me, save tan his complexion ; but for all that, if ever I get in a similar fix again, I hope I may be in the company not of my friends, but of that particular stranger.”

“ What did he do ?” Mountjoy asked, languidly, slowly stripping a peach of its velvet skin ; for as he argued, when a fellow once begins to tell a story about himself, there’s no telling when he will stop.

“ I was in the 300th Foot before I exchanged into the —th Dragoons, you know,” Mowbray explained ; “ and I was at the Cape for a year waging war against irrepressible Kaffirs. One day I went out from Fort Beaufort to look for quail in company with Derwent of ours, one of the nicest boys in the service. In our eagerness to fill our bags we got further away from the fort than was altogether safe ; but there were none of our black

friends in sight, and we strayed further and further beyond the frontier in foolhardy confidence; towards noon we got so tired, and our eyes ached so much with staring after our game through the glare of an African sun, that we agreed we would sit down and rest on one of the least arid patches of grass we could find. We sat there a long time, refreshing ourselves with reminiscences of home; and as we talked I grew drowsy, and dropping off to sleep dreamt pleasant dreams. Derwent did not disturb me; in fact, I imagine he slept also. For a while the red dusty plain turned into English meadows, the cool shadows of lime boughs fleckered the hot air, and the gleam of a river flashed through the green gloom. I was just asking Derwent if it wasn't jolly to be back in England again, when I felt a sharp pain in my foot and woke up to see that I was still in Africa, and that I'd got some of the native produce piercing my heel. 'Wake up,' I

cried to Derwent, who was lying like a log a few paces off; ‘I’m hurt by one of their d—d assaghies, and you may be sure there’s more where that came from.’

“Derwent made no answer. I shook him impatiently, and then—well I’ll pass quickly over this part of the story. Only my friend could not speak to me any more, for one of those devilish spears was piercing him through his heart, and when I lifted his head he looked up at me as only the dead can look. I had hardly time to realise what had happened when a faint whirr broke the full stillness of the air, and about half a dozen more assaghies fell round me.”

“It never rains but it pours,” Carden observed sententiously. While Mountjoy shuddered. “Deuced unpleasant,” he said; “thank Heaven I’m in the Butterflies.”

“I turned round at this,” pursued Mowbray, “and pulled out my pistols, but I didn’t think they would be of much use, for

from the clear depths of distance came a swift moving line, black against the sky ; and as the brutes advanced nearer I could see their spears quivering in their hands. I wasn't hit yet, and I gave just one look in the direction of the fort to see if there was any chance of a reinforcement from that quarter."

" What a pity you couldn't hedge," interposed Carden.

" I saw only one man, a sportsman apparently, like myself, for he was carrying game bags ; but he had the advantage over me of being mounted on one of those clever little bush horses. I shouted to him to make for the fort. I believed that two of us could make no stand against the Kaffirs, who were apparently thirteen in number, and I thought the other fellow might obtain reinforcements in time to rescue Derwent's and my body, for I need hardly observe that I counted myself as being very near death at that moment."

“I suppose he loafed off?” suggested De Smith.

“On the contrary, to my vexation he disregarded my signals and galloped up to me immediately, pulling out a couple of revolvers as he drew near. ‘Go back!’ I said. ‘What’s the good of letting them have us both? ride to the fort for your life, and send some men to bring back what’s left of us.’”

“‘You’d be finished before I got there,’ he said, coolly. ‘Is *he* of any good?’ (pointing to Derwent).

“‘No,’ I said, choking (Derwent was such a nice fellow).

“‘Then,’ he suggested, ‘let’s divide his arms.’

“Quick as the word he plucked Derwent’s pistols out of his belt.

“‘Go back,’ I said, sullenly. ‘You can do no good here.’

“All his answer was to ask for a pencil.

“‘Do you want to take odds?’ I asked,

with a dismal attempt at a jest. ‘It’s fifty to one on the dark horse.’

“He tore a slip of paper from his pocket-book, and fastened it to his pony’s bridle; then he turned its head towards home and gave it a cut over the quarter. ‘Go home!’ he cried, and off the pony galloped. A flight of assaghies trembled through the air and fell in showers round the retreating pony: fortunately he escaped untouched.

“‘They are clever fellows,’ my companion said. ‘They guessed what I was after, but I think they must have shot away all their spears; that’s one consolation. Now, when they get within range, kneel and fire.’

“In another moment they were close on us, but two out of the thirteen were down.

“‘Try and imagine they’re quails!’ my friend cried, seeing my hand shake a little. ‘Everything depends on nerve.’

“We discharged our second barrels but

with less effect, for I missed my man. A return fire blazed at us; but the Kaffirs are not such good marksmen with guns as with spears, and they did not touch us. My friend pushed me down behind him—‘Load there,’ he cried, ‘while I fire.’

“Not fancying using him as a shield, I loaded where I was, and for my pains got hit by a ball in the arm. The force of the blow was tremendous, and knocked me backwards, but I got to my knees again in time to pick off a Kaffir who was just taking aim at me.

“‘Well done!’ my companion said, cheerfully. ‘Now they’re only eleven.’

“The words had scarcely passed his lips when I was hit in the side, and fell over Derwent’s body; almost simultaneously my companion was stricken to his knees, but he struggled up to me so as to be between me and the firing. The black faces crowded nearer. I gasped out—‘Never mind me.’

The other nodded and took aim once more : it was his last remaining charge, and it must have done good work, for I heard a yell, and then the butt-end of the pistol smashed the face of an avenging Kaffir, who leapt forward on us like a cat. There was a confusion of black arms striking down desperately on my companion. I saw him wrench a musket from one man, and lay it about him in a furious determination to sell his life inch by inch.

“ I attempted to sit up and give one blow to help him, but my head reeled and I fell back fainting, feeling conscious of nothing but a strong smell of blood and the weight of my friend’s body as he fell on me, his face and chest to the enemy, his arms outstretched over me to shelter me to the last. I heard a voice cry out, in the native dialect, ‘ You must die !’

“ A voice answered, ‘ Amen.’

“ Then I became quite unconscious, and when I recovered my senses it was to find

myself (very much to my own surprise) alive at Fort Beaufort, and to learn that a troop of our own people had reached us just in time to prevent the final blow being given to my friend's head.

“I need scarcely say that I have never forgotten that stranger who was so great a friend, and that the happiest moment of my life was when I heard that he had recovered of his severe wounds after a long and troublesome illness.

“When I went to thank him I couldn't say a word, but sat and stared at his pale face and bandaged limbs, until I had to run away for fear the men should see me crying like a baby.”

“Small blame to you,” Lord Clairveaux broke in, the chivalry inherited from an ancient and gallant race flushing his face with nervous excitement. “It was *grand*! Who was the fellow? A gentleman, I'll be bound.”

“Yes, he must have been a thorough-

bred—it was ‘good form’—very!” chimed in Carden, draining off his wine.

“Who was he?” “Is he alive still?” “Where is he?” the others cried, infected by Lord Clairveaux’s enthusiasm.

“I thank God,” Captain Mowbray said, his handsome face bright with the memory of what he had just related, “that he does live, and that I see him here now—a bit older perhaps, but still the same man who set himself between me and what seemed certain death. Look here!”

Thurstan caught hold of Douglas’ wrist and, before the latter had time to resist his intention, pushed up the cotton sleeve and pulling forward the arm, cried—

“There’s the scar of the first wound you got, Douglas. I never saw the last inflicted, for I was insensible when those black devils closed on you. This is the man who saved my life, Clairveaux. I’ve told you the way he did it.”

“Will you honour me by shaking hands

with me?” Lord Clairveaux said, turning his glistening eyes on Douglas. “It is one of the pluckiest things I ever heard of.”

“It is nothing to be proud of,” Douglas answered, quietly, as he accepted the prof- fered courtesy. “I had no particular pleasure in my life, and was glad to risk it for the sake of a younger man who might have more than mere existence at stake.”

“What had I to lose more than your- self?” Thurstan said, hotly, jealous of any depreciation of his friend’s motives.

“The love of friends—the upward look of ambition—the glories of hope—the wild joys of passion—the buoyant delight which youth feels in its own breath—these are what a man loses if he is disrupted violently from life while his ‘years are green.’ ”

“Say what you like, you won’t get *me* to underrate what you did,” Mowbray said, laughing; “considering that, but for you, my head might be one of a shrivelled row of similar trophies swinging in a Kaffir

belle's wigwam. Let us fill our glasses and drink Robert Douglas' health."

For a moment Captain Mowbray's guests forgot real reserve and affected hauteur (even in little Mountjoy's breast the man got the better of the guardsman), and cheered like noisy, fresh-hearted schoolboys. No one wished to hold aloof now from the haggard man who sat there in his rough suit, so incongruous with them in appearance, so grandly superior in experience. De Smith was the least enthusiastic of the party ; for, as he observed confidentially to Clairveaux, when the two were lighting their cigarettes after dinner, " it's all very fine, but he never can be in our set, you know."

" Can't be in yours, I dare say," responded the young nobleman, between the puffs of smoke. " Should be very glad if I could get him in mine."

Whereat Percy De Smith felt himself snubbed.

“ Excuse the question, sir,” the valet said to Douglas, when he showed the latter to his bedroom that night, “ but when you behaved in that ’ansome way to master, did you do it in these clothes?”

## CHAPTER II.

### HIDDEN ARROWS.

DOUGLAS was too fatigued to appreciate the rest he so much needed. All night long his slumbers were broken and troubled ; the phantoms of falling leaves kept making gold streaks through the black hours, and he constantly fancied that he was lying on the Park bench, the faint damp scent of dew-wet earth under him, and the mist folding in vaporous density over the City's spires ; then suddenly all turned to heat and glare ; black faces crowded round him, terrible with animal rage and lust for blood.

Strange tongues cried out for his life, and he laughed a low pained laugh in his sleep, and said to them—"Your spears are less fierce than thirst and hunger." Just as an assaghay was descending on his breast, a whirlwind blew all the faces away. Then all around him was dark void : he seemed to be in a monstrous space, where his hands could not grasp nor his feet receive support ; his heart sank with mortal terror, as he felt himself descending in what seemed a fathomless abyss. He cried to heaven for aid ; he called out the names of friends and kindred long dead, to help him in his need, but he could hear nothing in reply—nothing but the surging of the waves and the low moan of an unseen ocean. Presently, through the dense depths of space came a wavering line of light, thin and tremulous as a spider's filmy thread : to this his striving hands clung, and to his ineffable relief he found the frail line firm as granite. Aided by some unseen power, he appeared

to be drawn up through vast realms of nothingness, until the glory of a day brighter than earth's sunniest hours blazed on his abashed face, his foot was planted in a silvery bed of floating moss, his hands caught at glowing blossoms that were blown by heavenly winds against his brow. Music thrilled through the flowers, mellow fruits fell unbruised at his feet, and he heard whispered—"My penance is over : being is sweet to me at length!" when a baleful face pressed from out the divine tanglement of sight and sound, and a voice he knew cried—"In choosing me you chose hell." The heavenly phantasm melted away, and in its place the image of his old pain looked at him with boldly shameful eyes. With outstretched arms the phantom pressed towards him. He recoiled, and fell sobbing into the gloom below, her white hand striking at him as he fell. Under the keen sting of that light touch he awoke—

awoke with a great throb of his heart and a pang of fear, such as the bravest man may feel when oppressed by the mysterious terrors of malign dreams. The strong hand is paralyzed and cannot thrust aside the shape of horror; the feet are spell-bound, and fail in the effort to escape the pursuing hand; the voice dies on the lips, and cannot scream out the heart's agony. In this twilight of the senses we sometimes suffer such dull, deep pain that we would willingly exchange it for the more poignant but less helpless anguish of our more wakeful hours.

Douglas arose and gave a sigh of relief as he opened his window and drew in breaths of fresh morning air. After the gloom of his dream it was pleasant to see the grey still morning broadening into day, and to hear the active signs of life begin to echo down the streets. He was too restless to attempt to resume his slumbers, so he dressed, and went down into Captain Mow-

bray's sitting-room, in search of a book to while away the hours until breakfast. It was the same room Thurstan and his friends had occupied after the dinner of the previous night. It hardly seemed a chamber likely to furnish interest or occupation for a studious man. The scent of cigars still lingered in the muslin curtains; the centre table was stained with fruit and covered with empty tumblers; errant grapes had fallen on to the rugs and there been immolated under men's heels; uncorked soda-water bottles rolled listlessly on the marble chiffoniers, and cigarette ashes had burnt white patches in the rose-coloured carpet. On the sofa, lying on a crumpled heap of sporting papers, was a bull terrier, who kept one eye fixed on Douglas's movements with a wary scrutiny suggestive of aversion for sheriff's officers. His creamy jowl was wrinkled over the folds of "Bell's Life," his tail kept sweeping ward over "Land and Water." However much Douglas might

wish to peruse these interesting records of sport, it would have been hardly safe to dare that ominous growl and winking eye. Dumb bells and moogdars, single-sticks and bulbous-looking boxing-gloves occupied the corners of the room ; photographs of favourite burlesque dancers were heaped in the card-dish, the confusion of legs somewhat resembling one of Doré's curious illustrations to Dante, where the soles of sinners protrude from the infernal lake. "Queens of Song" smiled on the walls in juxtaposition with monarchs of the turf. Patti looked blandly at Melbourne, and Melbourne sniffed meditatively at his cat ; a mahogany-coloured portrait of Gladiateur (bearing about as much resemblance to that noble animal as the old "Beauties of the Aristocracy" engravings did to real flesh and blood) hung over the mantelpiece, and the crook of a hunting-whip clung for support to the delicately rounded arm of the Parian Venus which stood on the bracket under-

neath the bookshelves. Douglas could find nothing but little green pyramids of "Ruff's Guide to the Turf," heaped over the more solid shapes of "Sponge's Sporting Tour," "Handley Cross," "Manual of Cavalry Drill," "The Mysteries of Paris," and an odd volume of "Spiritual Wives."

Douglas turned from these to look at a highly-finished coloured photograph which stood in an open case on an adjacent table. It was a portrait of Captain Mowbray, and had been done for Lady Diana Merton, by that lady's especial desire. The pride which some savage tribes feel in collecting their enemies' scalps, Lady Diana experienced in the accumulation of the similitudes of those who had fallen victims to her charms. Douglas, all unconscious of the portrait's destination, looked at it with interest. In his fatigue of body and mind on the previous evening he had scarcely observed how much his host had altered since that hot day of peril at the Cape. He saw in

this well-executed likeness how handsome Captain Mowbray had become in the years which had deepened the furrows on his own brow. Large deep-coloured brown eyes, crisp, short swarthy curls, rippling closely over a square, somewhat low forehead, a nose aquiline but delicate in outline, lips somewhat full, overshadowed by a gold-brown moustache, a chin and throat round and firm as that of Antinous, a figure in which power showed itself in graceful rather than in unwieldy outline ; such was Thurstan Mowbray at the age of twenty-four.

“ It is a fine thing to be young,” Douglas thought, as he looked at the face which had youth’s roundness in the chin and brow, youth’s bloom in the shining eyes and dewy red lips. “ The boy has grown older in beauty since I saw him fronting those black fellows with such determination on his boyish face, while years with me have deepened every uncouth trace of time and care.—Good morning, Mowbray. I was

admiring your portrait: how excellent it is"—for Captain Mowbray had just entered the room, and looked rather consciously at the photograph as he returned his friend's greeting.

"Yes; it is done by the particular wish of—a friend of mine," Thurstan said. "Will you come to breakfast, Douglas? after which we will come back here and have a smoke; there are no end of things I want to talk to you about."

"In the first place," Thurstan began, when the two returned to the sitting-room, "let us make ourselves comfortable." In pursuance of which object he placed himself in an easy chair and his legs on the mantelpiece, put a cigar between his lips, and called to the terrier "to come and be cossetted."

Douglas sat by the open window looking at his companion with that thoughtful, intent gaze, which had for years past been his habitual expression.

" You said last night," Thurstan pursued, when the terrier had curled itself round in a ball on his knees, and the cigar was lighted to his satisfaction, " that you were going to give me a chance of being of use to you ; and I wish you to understand that there is nothing in the world I won't do for you if I have the power. So now go ahead."

" What I require is simple enough," the other answered. " I shall not tax your kindness very heavily, although I know I might do so with impunity. Is not your father a country gentleman ?"

" He was," Thurstan admitted, " until the force of impecuniosity compelled him to go and live abroad."

" Do you often see him ?"

" In summer they don't give you much leave, because of the commander-in-chief's annual breaking out in field days ; and in the winter I can't make up my mind to

desert my native foxes; but when the season is late and the fences blind, I generally contrive to get to Naples for a few days."

"It is through your father that I must chiefly hope to attain my object," Douglas said. "I wish to live in some place in the country where my manner of life will be as simple and retired as possible. I expect in a few days to receive a little money from an agent abroad: it will not be more than enough to clothe me decently and to start me in a home of the humblest description, consequently I must adopt some means of supplying my wants in future. I want to take in a few pupils."

"Won't you let me——" Thurstan began, eagerly, his face flushing a little.

"No," broke in the other, divining the meaning of the blush and hesitation. "My dear boy, you must remember that I am a Scotchman, and, as my old countrywoman

said, ‘If we are puir we’re verra grand.’ It would be impossible for a Mer—for a Douglas to live on his friends: you must help me my own way or not at all.”

“As you will,” Thurstan said, rather vexed, “but C—— will always let me have an advance.”

“At sixty per cent. you mean? I didn’t save you from Kaffirs to get you clawed by harpies. What I wish is that you should get your father to exert what influence he may yet retain near Auriel to procure me a few pupils—public-school boys, whom I might prepare for the university.”

Thurstan stared wonderingly at the speaker. “You a coach!” he muttered; “you don’t look like it. And you won’t let me help you in any other way?”

“I’m sorry if my appearance is against me,” Douglas said, smiling with that sweet rare smile of his which lit up his face with an evanescent charm which was almost beauty; “Perhaps, when I have discarded

the Yankee stripes, I shall better resemble an instructor of youth: you can help me in no other way."

"Would you not like to live in some more civilized place than Auriel?" suggested Captain Mowbray. "Would you not prefer some appointment in town?"

"No," Douglas answered, emphatically; "I should not. I have tried both modes of life. I have lived surrounded by the culture of civilization, and I have bivouacked where the gibberish of wild animals was the only sound that broke the silence of the primeval solitudes, but I have never found a tiger cat so cruel as a woman, nor any colony of malicious apes so spiteful as men. Since I have been in England I have felt more desolate than I have done for years. When I was abroad I used to dream of faces that looked brightly at me; of voices that welcomed me back home. I never realized how completely I was dissevered from all the old social ties until I returned

to a world where I am as one dead. If I lived in London I should die of its solitude : I should be like a hungry mendicant who crouches at a rich man's door, watching crowds of guests being welcomed to the feast within while he starves on mouthfuls of bleak wind, and shivers in a cloak of snow. Never ask me to come back to London. Peace is what I seek ; and I shall find it best in some quiet country home where I can devote the rest of my life to literary pursuits. I shall hope to increase my income by my writings. I should have lived abroad a few years longer to finish my work on Brazilian forests, but I found my money and health failing me, so I brought my notes home with me ; and these, and similar memoranda on other subjects, will assist me in completing my manuscripts. Depend upon it, Mowbray, this is the only sort of life I shall find tolerable to me."

"If you must you must," Captain Mow-

bray said; “but I should think you would find it awfully slow. I will write to my father to-day, and at the same time to the clergyman of the parish ; he was an old schoolfellow of my father’s, and has boys of his own.”

“Understand that I do not require society,” interrupted Douglas. “Indeed, I shall only see my pupils in study hours. But you must stand sponsor for my character, and for my proficiency in classics, et cetera.”

“I will do that with pleasure,” Thurstan answered, readily ; “but I wouldn’t advise you to produce me as a show pupil. Do you remember, how, at the Cape, I used to write spoony notes to the brigadier’s daughter, and came to you to know if I was to spell eternal with one ‘l’ ? I have forgotten little Rosie, but I haven’t forgotten how to spell eternal. That reminds me, Douglas, I want to ask your advice.”

“About spelling?”

“Oh, no; I always carry a pocket dictionary about with me now; but it is about a letter. Just look here.”

Captain Mowbray drew a small, delicately-tinted photograph from his breast-pocket as he spoke and handed it to his friend.

“Well!” he said, impatiently, after a few moments’ silence, “what do you think of it?” He looked at Douglas’s face, anxious to read there the sympathetic admiration he sought; but the latter was covering his eyes with one hand to shield himself from the glare of the sun.

“She is very pretty.”

“She is more than pretty,” Thurstan answered, with enthusiasm. “She is the loveliest creature I ever saw.”

“Who is she?”

“She is the lady those fellows were speaking of last night, Lady Diana Merton. She is a widow, you know.”

"No, I did not know," Douglas said, quietly. "Who was her husband?"

"Oh! he was drowned years ago, and a good thing too! I do not think she was very happy with him."

"Was it his fault?" Douglas asked, with a touch of bitterness in his voice.

"She says so. He was a hard-headed Scotchman, grave and saturnine, older than herself, and unwilling to make allowances for the freaks of a pretty, spoilt child. Besides, he was very learned, and she says she hates bookworms."

"So she has come to you for contrast," Douglas suggested, a little maliciously.

"I think, you know," Thurstan hesitated, now puffing vigorously at his cigar, "that — aw — she really likes me, you know, better than she ever did any other fellow."

"Then I am to congratulate you?"

An indescribable expression passed over Douglas's face as he spoke, which Thurstan,

occupied by his cigar and his embarrassment, did not notice.

“ Well—no, not exactly,” the latter said, ruefully. “ The fact is, whenever I press for some decided answer—when I tell her that I wish then to make my life hers, and that——”

“ Excuse the interruption; but what are your prospects?”

“ They lie in a nutshell,” Thurstan admitted. “ The Queen’s pay and an allowance of three hundred pounds per annum. I can’t offer her my commission, that’s mortgaged.”

“ And how much do you suppose you owe?”

“ Somewhere about fifteen thousand pounds.”

“ Is Lady Diana aware of your circumstances?” Douglas asked, fixing his keen eyes on the younger man’s face.

“ Yes; but that makes no difference. She is not mercenary.”

"Have you ever given her any presents?" Douglas said, carelessly.

"Only a bracelet or two set with brilliants, and a locket containing my hair. The locket was the most valuable, and it only cost a hundred and fifty pounds. She said she would never part with it."

"I dare be sworn she won't," Robert Douglas remarked, with a grim smile. "And are you quite sure that the lady is sincere with you?"

"No man but yourself should put such a question," Thurstan said, with a hot gleam of anger in his brown eyes.

"I beg your pardon," Douglas answered, meekly. "I am certain that there is no woman like her."

"She has one fault," Thurstan admitted, mollified by his friend's apology. "She won't let me speak out. When I'm with her she nearly drives me mad. I want to tell her what I feel. The words keep bubbling up from my heart to my lips, and

then, just as I summon up courage to bear the sound of my own voice, she gives me her pretty hand to hold, or sends me wild by bringing her pink lips and sweet eyes close to my face, saying, with an innocent air of meditation, ‘Of what are you thinking?’ And then—Halloo! Douglas, what are you about?’

For Mr. Douglas had accidentally upset the small table on which he leant, and with it a large bottle of ink, which sent quicksilver-like pools of swart fluid floating under the bull-terrier’s feet, causing the latter to lift up his milk-white toes with a look of intense disgust.

“I beg your pardon. I suppose I moved too suddenly. What sort of advice is it you require of me?”

“The best you can give.”

“My advice is, then, that you should insist on having some conclusive answer. Such love as yours deserves, at the least, a clear understanding as to what is to be its

definite aim. If you are to win her, the sooner you are blessed with that intelligence the better. If you are to lose her it will be her fault, not your own; is it not so?"

Thurstan nodded.

"Then she does not deserve you should waste any more time or feeling on her. Insist on bringing matters to a climax. Show her that you are determined to have an answer."

"I am sure not to be able to get it out when it comes to the point. I had better write it," Captain Mowbray said, thoughtfully. "She is going down to her Brighton house to-morrow. I will write first, and then follow my letter down; but I shall say nothing of this to-day. I am now going to call on her. My horse is at the door. Will you excuse me a little while, Douglas?"

"Certainly."

"Then good-bye until dinner-time."

“Good-bye.”

Captain Mowbray turned round when he got to the door.

“You don’t know how beautiful she is, Douglas,” he said, enthusiastically, “or how good.”

“No, I do not,” Douglas replied, drily, and the door closed on the departing lover.

## CHAPTER III.

## IT IS NOT WORTH THE KEEPING.

“It is all over, then?”

What was all over? Not the murmurous kiss of the waves slipping up the ridges of warm golden shingle; not the bright sun-flecks that played with the shadows on the sea’s mutable breast; nor the beauty of the woman who sat leaning against the sides of a jutting rock, her sweet languid eyes cast downwards to avoid the glare of the sun, her listless hands crumpling notches of dried seaweed, and her heart beating not one whit faster than

did the cool pulses of the drowsy sea. That which "was all over" was Captain Mowbray's hope of winning the woman he loved. He had taken his friend's advice, and had

"Put it to the touch,  
To win or lose his all."

He had told himself for some time past that the suspense in which he was kept was unendurable; that he was outraged and wronged by the continual repression of his passion; that he would no longer live alternately maddened by temptation, and humbled by frustration—the pain of his love was too hard for him to bear—and that he would have a plain yes or no from those beautiful lips, the slightest quiver of which made his heart hunger for their touch.

And now he had his answer—not a straightforward one, for Lady Diana rarely had courage to be prompt and decided in these surgical operations of cutting away

hearts she had taught to cling to her. She sought to temporize and to sooth where temporization was fruitless, and soothing unavailing. She was particularly tender and gentle in her manner when her victim was young and handsome.

To-day she was especially pathetic ; but although Thurstan was, as we have said, no genius, yet he perfectly understood the nature of her softly-worded refusal. There are some questions in which the densest of men are quick to read an answer. A man not ordinarily intelligent or far-seeing may be lifted to a miserable pre-eminence of sensitive acuteness by the force of vivid passions.

Now that Captain Mowbray found that “ No ” was to be the end of all his longing hopes and angry fears, he felt faint and sick at heart. He could not look her in the face ; for a while he could not speak to answer her soft words. They seemed to sway with the moving flow of the sea ; and

"No, no, no," was lisped to him in countless ripples as the waves surged up near his feet. He had written, as he had purposed, to ask her to decide his fate. "If your answer be unfavourable, I do not know how I shall bear it," he wrote. "Remember how great is the stake I have thrown at your feet. Do not trample down my life. If I lost you I believe it would drive me mad——"

"They all say that," Lady Diana thought, as she looked at the letter tenderly; "but dear me! most of them get over it much sooner than they think they will."

"I must take your answer from your own lips," he concluded. "Will you meet me on the beach of the East Cliff this afternoon?"

"If I name five I shall get it over before dinner. What a comfort it is that there are so few people here this time of year; it is such a nuisance to be interrupted by having to give formal bows and smiles to the passers-by, just when one's face is

worked up to the right expression. My poor boy! Why does he make me hold the dagger that he may throw himself on it? I wish I could have staved this off a little longer."

At four o'clock she strolled down to the sea-side, and seated herself in the broken shadow of the rock, having just time to assume a graceful posture when she heard the quick, impatient steps of her lover crashing through the shingle above. Now, as he lay by her feet, his head resting on his hand, and his eyes turned away from her, with his whole soul sickened by disappointment, she felt very sorrowful for him, and again wished that he had not forced her to this painful necessity. He had put his question so briefly and determinately that she had not much scope for evasion. Still she did her best. She surrounded her refusal with such a sweet confusion of regret, remorse, and reciprocal passion, that any other less acute than a lover might

have been beguiled by the garlands with which she bedecked the hearse of hope. But through all the music of her broken words, all the tears that dimmed the sleepy depths of her grey eyes, Captain Mowbray read the word death ; and as the sense of his failure grew upon him his face became white, and his eyes dark with pain and anger. Death to love's thrall, love's fire, and love's hope—that was the portion the pink lips had dealt out on this slumbrous afternoon. When a ribbon fluttered from the woman's hair over Thurstan's hand, he caught it round his wrist, and kissing it passionately, wept a few hot, still tears, the sight of which filled Lady Diana with remorse and compunction. She had often seen men weep, and she always suffered pain at the sight. On this occasion, as on many others, she vowed that she would never again repeat an experiment fraught with so much grief of heart to others.

"You will soon get over this," she said, gently; "you will soon forget me."

"You may lose a limb; you may suffer awful physical wrack for a time, and afterwards look round and say, 'Was it I who suffered so much?' But the present pain is none the more endurable because in some far-off future its memory may be dim and indistinct. I do not believe now that I ever can forget either you or this hour. Oh, Diana! my darling! my darling! why will you not marry me? I would love you so, you could not help being happy with me."

She looked at him with a sort of tender envy. "I wish I could be as enthusiastic," she thought. Aloud she answered, softly, "You forget, Thurstan, that I am six years older than yourself."

"What does that matter?" he said, simply. "You don't look it; and, besides, if a fellow loves a woman, what matters her age, if she's the only one woman that can make him happy?"

Lady Diana glanced stealthily around. There was no one in sight but the distant figure of a man who stood on a far-off headland, peering through a telescope.

"I wonder if it is a good glass," Lady Diana said to herself. Then she looked at the handsome face near her, pale with pain of her causing, and she decided to risk the telescope's having a long sight.

She drooped her head on to his shoulder, and the silky burthen of hair which crowned it swept his lips.

"It can never be," she murmured ; "but I do love you, Thurstan : never believe that I don't love you."

His face flushed as he felt her touch ; his heart's blood was a flame that blazed and ebbed at her breath.

"Then why not——?" he began.

"Do not go into that again : it cannot be. It hurts me as much as it can you to refuse you," she cried. "I cannot tell you now all the reasons that make our union

impossible. You must know that I would marry you if I could, and that I do like you above all other men."

He looked at her face now, and saw that it was working with emotion. He seized her by her hands, and looked steadfastly into her eyes.

"Oh!" he cried, with something like a groan, "can such a face lie?"

"I do not lie," she went on, passionately.  
"I swear that I love you."

"Then marry me!"

For a few seconds the lap of the waves was all that broke the brooding silence of the noon.

Should she end it now?—all the degrading trickery by which she was ever shaming her nature? Should she let all the small meannesses of coquetry be merged in one great honest love? Should she give up luxury and self-indulgence, and put away all those lusts of the flesh and the devil against which her godfathers' and

godmothers' liberal gifts of silver mugs and infantile spoons had made so poor a defence ?

She heard the slow rush of the waves as it were in a dream ; saw in a dream the glow of the day, and her lover's face looking yearningly in hers, as the sun shone down on their clasped hands ; heard as in a dream the whisper of a passing angel, who swept the pure light of his wings over her soul, as he counselled her to accept the good impulse as a gift from heaven.

Then she looked up at Lord Orme's house, which was visible from where the two stood.

" If I part from my liberty at all, it must be for that, and such as that."

The generous, half-formed, half-murmured yea, which had leapt to her lips, died away unspoken. The tremulous regret passed away from her eyes, and the beautiful face was once more inflexible with denial.

“I see it all,” Captain Mowbray said, gloomily. “You are weary of me. I have loved you too well, and shown it too plainly. You have played with me as a human toy to whom the Creator has given capability to suffer, which renders the amusement more poignant and exciting. You are tired of the game, and now I may go to the devil my own way.”

“I do not suppose you will go to the devil,” Lady Diana replied, quietly; “men inclined to traverse that road, rarely retard or accelerate their footsteps on account of a woman’s love. You will be no worse for this brief sharp pain in future.”

“I shall be no better.”

“And if you ever feel inclined to judge me harshly,” she pursued, “remember that you are not the only one who has suffered in this day’s parting. It costs me much to give you up, and I shall sicken at the thought of the future spent without you. Oh, my darling!” she added, with a sudden

outburst of candid feeling, "I shall miss you terribly for a long time—for a long time!"

He looked at her longingly; but he did not speak.

It is not easy even for the most consummate and experienced of coquettes to make a man believe, that while throwing him over, she is still heart and soul his own.

"It is to be good-bye, then," he said, gloomily.

"It must be so, I fear; don't make it harder to me."

In truth she felt rather injured by the undue amount of pain this scene was causing her: it was very selfish of her lover to feel so much, and to make her feel that he did so.

"Good-bye!" he said, and he flung away her hands, and turned to go.

She caught hold of his arm, pleadingly, and cast one more quick look round her.

"Kiss me once before you go."

It was weak of him to give way to the temptation, to grant her the benign triumph of feeling that he would be haunted by the memory of that kiss so long as he remembered her, and how she had wronged him. She had never given him her lips before ; and she did so now that his heart was sore with provocation, because the kindhearted wanton would fain administer a little honey with the sting ; because she liked both him and herself so well, that she wished to yield him balm for the wound, and to give herself such comfort as Anna Boleyn's executioner felt when he recalled that he had handled the Queen's neck "full tenderly."

"Won't you kiss me ?" she said, piteously.

He was only four-and-twenty, and as much of a philosopher as a Dragoon at that age ordinarily is. He was insulted and angered by her conduct; he suspected her of treachery, and had felt inclined once or twice to-day to curse the lovely face which held him in such thrall.

But none the less did he feel the thrall; none the less was his heart drawn towards her every movement, her every trick of voice and gesture ; and when he heard those faint beseeching tones, and saw the face he loved so near his own, he caught her in his arms, and kissed her in such fashion that she somewhat repented herself of her gentle advance.

“Go!” he said at last, pushing her from him. “Go! I have got to feel very old in this hour ; I think pain and anger have taken all the youth out of me : perhaps one day you will be sorry that you threw away my love. Meanwhile you had better keep yourself out of my sight ; for after having once touched your dear mouth, I should find it hard not to repeat the offence, even though you should have married a worthier, and, what is better, a wealthier man.”

But although he hurled this last reproach at her, he did not altogether believe what

he hinted. Lady Diana's blandishments were rarely thrown away on the weak, vain natures of men.

Captain Mowbray half acquitted her already, as he recalled the rapture of that last caress.

They parted with one lingering clasp of hands at the foot of the slopes; and then Lady Diana trailed her cool-hued draperies away in the direction of her house.

"Poor darling! how he felt it!" she thought, sadly.

But she smiled through her tears at a good-looking officer from the cavalry barracks, who was calling at her door as she arrived there, and begged that he would come and "cheer her solitude" tomorrow.

Then she entered her drawing-room, where a certain sheep-dog—a Miss Jones, a lady companion of Lady Diana's, generally only produced on state occasions,

like the family plate—was knitting away time with various devices in crochet.

“Miss Jones,” Lady Diana said, impressively, “do be so kind as to give orders that they should not boil the sweetbreads to rags to-night.”

“Yes, Lady Diana.”

“And, oh, I am going to start for Italy in a few days, and hope for the pleasure of your company.”

Poor Miss Jones, who was always ill in the packet-boats, and who suffered agonies from headache at the jar and vibration of railways, looked very dismal at this intelligence; but how can a lady who estimates her services at the rate of thirty pounds per annum, expect to have her stomach or head considered?

Lady Diana walked pensively out of the room, thinking not at all of Miss Jones’s troubles.

“I shall find the Ormes at Spezzia,” she said to herself, “and I shall sometimes row

in that lovely harbour with Lord Orme, and the eternal boatman who is always the only one who rowed Milor Byron up and down the gulf; and I will see Miss Slater and the girls at the bottom of that gulf before I permit them to join the expedition. Heigho! there goes the dinner-bell."

Meanwhile, Captain Mowbray was still left standing by the rocks; and when the gloom of night crept over sea and land, and no faint tinge of sunset was left to flush the rugged-faced cliffs with evanescent glory, the young fool cast himself down near the place where she had sat, and kissed the sharp-edged cliff as though it had possessed the softness of woman's lips.

Among the great and little mysteries of this world of ours, which may one day be made clear to man's perplexed eyes, I wonder if he will learn the secret of the fascination which a flame of death is permitted to have for the harmless moths of night.

## CHAPTER IV.

## JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE.

WHEN Captain Mowbray returned to his lodgings in town, Douglas quickly perceived that his friend's manner was that of a man who has been foiled in his desire. Thurstan swore at the bull-terrier because he stumbled over it, and then gave the injured-looking, wrinkled face such caresses as people sometimes lavish on dumb creatures when their hearts are aching from the unkindness of their own species—a kind of cynical, Byronical, "I never had but one" (friend) and "here he lies," sort of feeling.

Then Thurstan could not eat his dinner, but sat and stared moodily at the various delicacies on the table, and begged that Douglas would take care of himself, and “not mind him.” When the meal was over, and the two sat in the moonlit balcony, smoking their cigars, Captain Mowbray could no longer keep the pain of his secret to himself, but burst out suddenly with—

“By G— she’s jilted me !”

Douglas looked kindly at the boy’s downcast face.

“It seems hard to bear now,” he said, gently; “young hearts bleed so freshly, but then they heal quickly. A few months hence, and the memory of this will be nothing more than a dull feeling of discomfort to you.”

“It is all very well to say that,” Thurstan cried petulantly, “you don’t know what it is to love a woman as I did this one, or you would understand that such pain as mine cannot be forgotten quickly.”

“And yet I once loved a devil in the guise of a woman so well that her loss made me a murderer and an outcast.”

“Good God, Douglas! what do you mean?”

“Hear my story before you condemn me by my own words,” Douglas said quickly; “and when you have heard it, tell me if you don’t think the love of a woman has laid a heavier burthen on me than you are ever likely to be cursed with.

“When I was about five years older than you are now, I was married to one of the prettiest creatures you ever saw.”

“You married!” echoed Mowbray with astonishment.

“She was as lovely as that portrait you showed me yesterday,” pursued Douglas; “more lovely because she was younger.

“She was my cousin, and I had loved her ever since she was a child and I a great gawky schoolboy. I used to spend my midsummer holidays at her father’s place;

and in the evenings when he and his guests were at dinner we wandered out by ourselves through the cool shadows of the Park, and conjectured of the glorious far-off future. Ana would wear royal robes, and a gold crown round her brighter hair. She would own hundreds of slaves, and I should be her chief and most favoured servitor. She would live surrounded by homage and adulation. She would have no nurses, but always jam tarts for dinner. She would wear red shoes, and build a room lined with mirrors. I used to think that she seemed very lovely as she sat with her little red mouth pursed up, and her eyes looking gravely bland at the contemplation of her future dignities. I for my part intended to travel. I wished to penetrate into the more desolate portion of the far east; where I could see the wild cherry-trees force their way through the old Asiatic temples, and hear the parrots chatter round the sacred fanes. Above all

I wished to kill a tiger, and to be gifted with strength that would enable me to thrash Tom Spenser, the big bully of our school. If at fifteen I had possessed half the intuition a girl has at ten, I should have already detected the coquettish propensities of my little Ana. She rarely moved without a sidelong glance to see who was observing and admiring her pretty face; and at eleven years old she could fix a bunch of ribbons or a flower in her hair much more becomingly than could the old nurses who had attended her from her birth. Time passed away quickly and pleasantly in those days. I was very successful at school, and used to bring piles of prize-books to Ana and write her name inside them; announcing in crooked characters that they were given 'to her as keepsakes by her affectionate friend.' Ana smiled pleasantly at the gifts; but she generally gave me to understand that a new sash or a trinket would be more

acceptable ; and once she cried with rage and vexation when I presented her with my last school acquisition, a copy of the *Odyssey*, bound in morocco ; for as she said ‘Of what use was the nasty thing to her when she couldn’t read it, and what business had I to be able to read it when she could not ?’

“ This is the pleasantest part of my story ; the rest I will tell as briefly as possible. When Ana was seventeen and I eight-and-twenty we were married. I was always a grave, quiet man, and perhaps she never knew how gaily my heart used to beat at the sound of her laugh—how depressed I felt if the slightest cloud of discontent passed over her lovely face. We were not very rich, and when my father’s interest obtained me a lucrative appointment in India, I was glad to accept it. We lived in India two years, blessed to me by the peaceful fullness of gratified love, and by the society of the creature I prized most in

the world. One day I was summoned home to England. My father was in a failing state of health, and he was loth to die without once more seeing the faces of all his children. I could not resist such a summons, but I felt very sad at heart when my beautiful wife hung round my neck, giving me her farewell kiss.

“ She had resigned herself to not accompanying me she said, knowing that it was best so ; but I must write often to her, or her heart would break under the weight of her loneliness.

“ As I was leaving the door she ran up and asked me for one more caress. I gave her not one but many, and then I went on my way, observing with satisfaction that she watched me from the threshold as long as I was in sight.

“ When I had been gone about an hour or so on my journey, I was seized with a terrible longing to see her again. I resisted the impulse for a few seconds, called myself a

fool, and went on a few steps further ; then I thought of Ana's face, from which I was going further and further away in the blackness, and turning my horse's head round, I galloped back towards home, and in less than three-quarters of an hour I was again at my own door. I dismounted and walked softly towards the window of our sitting-room. 'How pleased she will be,' I thought; 'how the dear face will beam at the sight of mine !'

"My heart beat fast with pleasurable agitation as I pressed my face close to the window. I was on the point of calling her by her name when I saw her—oh hell ! I saw her sitting with her face turned away from me, her hands clasped in those of another man, her lovely head drooping languidly on his shoulder.

"I recognised the man at once ; he was an officer of artillery who had been a frequent visitor to my house, and whom I had always believed to be the soul of honour.

“There are certain flowers the remembered odours of which sicken me; for that still summer night was steeped with their fragrance. There are voices to recall which sting me with intolerable agony—the voices of my wife and her lover, murmuring low, through the twilight, their joy in each other’s society, their delight in my presumed absence.

“I cannot dwell on the wreck of that moment. I dare not remember all the storm of horrible feelings that surged up in my breast.

“I did not pause to ask myself whether she were or were not guilty to the last extreme. From what I have since heard of her, I believe she was practically innocent; but were it so, I hold her to be more meanly criminal than if she had erred through an excess of illicit passion. Her heart was full of dishonour; her mind must have been most foul, if for mere vanity’s sake she could so wrong me and herself.

“At that moment, when I saw her thus, I felt that I could sooner hold the vilest wretch that walked the streets to my bosom than the woman with whom I had lived for the last two years in happiness as beautiful as paradise.

“It was well for the grace of their parting that they did not perceive the pale face glaring against the window-pane. I seem to see now the smile with which he said, ‘*au revoir!*’ and her answering gesture, kissing her hand as he drew near the door and *me*, and to hear her light laugh as he stooped to press his lips on her hand.

“I concealed myself in the shrubs as he had passed out of sight of the house, and then I followed him until he reached a secluded portion of the road.

“‘And for bonnie Annie Laurie,  
I’d lay me down and die,’

he sang as he went in a rich, clear voice.

“‘Gad, how pretty she is! I’ll light a cigar.’

“He stopped by the side of a broken bit of rock to strike a light, and when he turned round, whistling gaily, he met me face to face.

“I had my travelling pistols with me, for some of the wilder districts, through which on my journey I was bound to pass, were infested with robbers. Without speaking, I showed these to him, indicating that he was to select one. He took the pistol mechanically, and then fell back with a face white as death.

“I gave him a few seconds to recover himself, and then I broke the silence.

“‘One of us *must* die,’ I said in a tone husky with the effort to repress my passion of rage and agony, ‘so it shall only be six paces. You will fire first.’

“He had recovered the shock my unexpected appearance had caused him, and, to do him justice, he did not shrink

now as he had done at the sight of my face.

“ He kept his cigar in his mouth, only moving it to say—

“ ‘ It could not be in a fairer cause ; God bless her ! ’

“ Probably he did not mean to hit me, but we were mad. I with wrath, he with terror. I did not pause to consider *convenances*. I called to him to aim straight at me, and as he raised his hand a sort of prayer rose to my lips that I might fall ; that my pain might pass away under the dim light of the stars ; that I might close my eyes and never again open them to look man or woman in the eyes.

“ I stood, however, untouched as his bullet whirred past me ; and in another second he fell to the ground like a dog. He turned on his side, saying, ‘ O God, this is death ! ’

“ Then he whispered something I could not hear. Whether he was muttering

a farewell to some distant friend, or entreating vainly for assistance I cannot say. I knelt by his side and lifted his head.

“‘Speak,’ I cried, ‘speak,’ for the silence was driving me mad.

“He looked at me blankly for a few moments, not appearing to recognise me; then a flash of intelligence lighted up his face, and he said, in a tone of piteous reproach, ‘You should have given me more time.’ Then his eyes turned upwards, his jaw dropped, and I knew that he would never speak any word again.

“I left him there, and mounting my horse, which was tethered close by, I rode away from the devilish spot, haunted by the horror of my own thoughts. The look I gave towards home was in itself a curse, could she have seen it. It was all the farewell I ever took of her.

“Yes, I left him there. I heard afterwards that his body was found that very

night; that it was carried away, and wept over by his friends; that it lies in a marble tomb which is gay with flowers and sung over by birds; but to me, he always seems to be lying in the shadow of that road; his face drawn by the pang of coming death; his voice faint and piteous, sending up a protest between me and my God against the rash haste of my anger.

“Mowbray, I can’t get away from those words; they are ever returning to me with the terrible force of avenging truth. Walking in the sunshine of day, or brooding in the dim eve—awake or asleep—in feasting or weeping—in laughter or in tears, I am stung by the memory of the dying man’s reproach—‘ You should have given me more time.’

“What became of your —— of her?” Captain Mowbray asked.

“She is well, and happy, I believe,” Douglas said, grimly. “Had she known that her infernal coquetry was to cause

that man's death, while his hand was still warm with her parting clasp, I do not believe that she could have refrained from practising the arts which led to that result. Not a single flower, not a gaud nor a ribbon of hers would have been worn that night without scrupulous regard to effect, even had she foreseen that her pretty trickeries would result in a life being lost and a soul damned. Had Diana been doomed as an Aristocrat in the Reign of Terror she would have stuck a rose over her ear as she went to the scaffold and have looked unutterable things at the priest who confessed her."

"Was her name Diana?" said Captain Mowbray with surprise.

"No, Ana; did I say Diana?" Douglas answered confusedly; "I suppose I was haunted by the name of your *inamorata*."

"Ah!" Captain Mowbray observed with a sigh. "Lady Diana has her faults—

what woman has not?—but to do her justice she is incapable of anything of that kind. Her kindness has been very sweet to me; her unkindness very bitter; but I cannot reproach her with levity. Her conduct towards other men in my presence has been simply perfect."

"The devil is never so dangerous as when he borrows an angel's face," Douglas observed, drily.

"Devil or angel, I should love her equally," Thurstan said; "the worst of it is, that her having thrown me over don't make me love her a bit the less."

"What are your plans?" Douglas asked.

"I must join my regiment, I suppose. I have only a few days' leave."

"Much better go to Paris for a week."

"If I take more leave now I shall not get so much during the hunting season," Thurstan said, disconsolately. "And why should I go to Paris?"

"I thought it would do you good," Douglas replied; "but," he added with a slight smile, "I do not know that you require the panacea since you can already look forward to the joy of next season's fox hunting."

"What would you do if you were in my place—if you felt as I do, you know?"—and Captain Mowbray sighed heavily as he cast away the burnt end of his cigar.

"If I were so unhappy as to love again at my present age," the other answered, looking dreamily at a tremulous star, "I should pray Heaven to grant my desire, or let me die. A young man battles against love's pain with his whole heart glorified by hope and faith; he fronts defeat with eyes radiant with prescience of success. I, who have outlived the hope, should be crushed, like Cassandra, by the gloom of foreseen misery should I again feel my heart stirred by the terrible, sweet trouble of reviving passion. If I were in your

position, Mowbray, blessed with good looks, an excellent digestion, and the prospect of enjoying many years of hopeful, vigorous life, I should treat this temporary cloud as if it were the shadow of an importunate creditor and go abroad to avoid it."

"I'll think it over," Thurstan said, gloomily, but his face brightened as he walked up stairs, humming a little French chanson which had lately become popular.

"If I go to Paris," he added, "I shall go and see —," mentioning an actress famous for graceful audacity ; "Clairveaux tells me she is charming in the new piece."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE WORLD FORGETTING.

*“But the usher sat remote from all,  
A melancholy man.”*

“WHAT’s to be done about your learning,  
Azalea ?”

George Moore had recovered the power of speech, and the partial use of his limbs ; but his language was often confused, and his face looked more troubled than it had done in the days before his seizure.

“What about it, dear ?” Azalea said, anxiously ; “I am sure I learn all you tell me to.”

“But, do you know, Azalea ?” the old man answered, somewhat piteously, “I’m

not sure I always tell you right : my memory is gone, and sometimes I wake up in the night, and am teased by the thought I may have put you wrong ; and then I want you to know how to do needlework, music, arithmetic, and painting, and all those sort of things."

Azalea looked perturbed.

"I know a little arithmetic," she said, "from counting the apples. I do it all on my fingers."

The old man shook his head. "That isn't the right way."

"Any way's right which you can do quickly and best," Azalea observed with unconscious philosophy. "And I can draw much better than Rosa or Amelia Orme; but then they're duffers."

"What?" Moore said with a puzzled expression."

"Oh! that's one of Conrad's words," Azalea answered, laughing.

"I don't believe it's in the dictionary,"

the old man said, gravely: "I hope those little Ormes haven't taught you bad words."

"I won't say it again," Azalea answered, meekly.

And Moore felt gratified both at her obedience and the reflection that he had snubbed the unconscious Conrad, of whom he was secretly jealous, Conrad being the only person Azalea ever mentioned with affection when she referred to her visit to Brighton.

Moore looked with despair at the tattered Virgil, feeling how uncertain a tenure his wavering mind held of its contents.

"I want her to hold up her head with the best of them when she grows up so that he can't taunt her with not having tastes and manners like his."

That speech of Lord Orme's implying that Azalea would be degraded by the life she had elected to lead was ever rankling in the old man's mind.

How to secure the requisite accomplishments without parting from his treasure was the problem that occupied his thoughts day and night.

Azalea confided the difficulty to old Sally : "I'm so sorry I can't learn more ; it seems to vex daddy so much," she said.

"I'm sure you know as much as is good for you. I don't hold with too much learning ; reading and writing only lead honest folks astray," Sally remarked, sententiously. "There's my eldest boy allays went to Sunday schule, and was took so much count of he was made clerk in a bank, where he made use of his larning to forge his master's name, and write courtin' letters to his missus, and of course his master was much put out about it, and poor Sam was sent over the water. So take warning by Sam, my dear, in case you should be tempted and fall like him."

"Who teaches at the school now?"

Azalea asked, disregarding the friendly warning ; “ who is the schoolmistress ?”

“ A stuck-up thing who don’t know B from a bull’s foot,” Sally said, contemptuously ; “ only the little chaps go there whose mothers want to keep ‘em out of mischief. Schools is handy in gleaning time, if they ain’t good for nothing else.”

“ Is there no one else who teaches ?” Azalea said, disconsolately ; “ isn’t there a school where I could learn singing and dancing, and those sort of things.”

“ They haven’t got further than the ‘ Old Hundredth ’ in the Sunday schule ; they try ‘ Hallelujah ’ sometimes, but it sounds very comical.”

Azalea pressed her face against the pane, and looked drearily at the red leaves whirring past.

“ What’s to be done ?” she said ; “ daddy frets so over what he calls my false quantities ; and then when he tries to explain he

stammers, loses his words, and cries. I quite dread the lesson hours."

"Mr. Douglas teaches the Squire's son," suggested Sally. A gleam of hope lit up Azalea's face.

"Who is he?" she asked. "Where does he live?"

"Oh! he's a mighty unsociable sort of man, who has come to live in the little house in the lane at the back of the church. He never will take a comfortable cup of tea with a neighbour, and shuts his door to the gentlefolks as well as the farmers; but he must be a wonderful clever man, for the Squire and the parson are going to send their lads there for a little while every holiday time, just to prevent their larning from slipping out of their heads like."

"If he teaches them, why shouldn't he teach me?" Azalea suggested.

Sally shook her head doubtfully: "I don't think he's much wropped up in gals;

he won't have no one but an old woman to do for him, and they do say he's wonderful ugly tempered."

"I shall think it over," Azalea said, and then she fell upon Topaz, and bestowed many caresses on his wrinkled chin, and smooth head, all of which the terrier received with an air of blinking condescension. Having soothed her mind by this proceeding, she put on her hat, and took the path that led to Church Lane, as that grassy shadowed road was called on the borders of which Robert Douglas's cottage stood. Her heart throbbed fast, and her lips whitened at the thought of her own design. Not that her nervousness checked her determination. She was one of those who carry a beautiful and serene courage in their hearts, which does successful war against all the cloudy terrors, the prescient agonies of a sensitive and vivid imagination. Ephemeral doubts and fears might float through her mind as sea vapours steal

round a rock's crest; but her purpose remained staunch and unshaken as the granite itself.

I feel much commiseration for my poor little heroine. She has genius and she has beauty. What more fatal provocatives to man's dislike and woman's hate could Nature have given her? Madame de Staël remarks somewhere that intellect for a woman is a magnificent mourning robe; and Azalea wears crape from her earliest years. It is a melancholy fate for her. She will suffer mentally, as those prisoners did physically who were tortured to death by never being allowed to close their eyes and sleep. She will detect motives, the discovery of which will break her heart. She will be troubled by the yearning of fruitless aspirations, and the sorrow of baffled ambition. Human passion, which is terribly intensified by mental sensitiveness; faith that grows confused with much questioning; love that overreaches

itself; hope that foresees its disappointment,—such are the guerdons of intellect. Those whose minds are confined to peaceful levels, if they miss the glory of ascending the heights, at least evade the painful vibration of passing through the air, and escape the clouds of doubt that choke aspiring souls ere they reach the summit.

Neither will her courage be a recommendation in the eyes of the superior sex. Men as a rule pity and love the creature that droops to them for protection; the woman who faints has the first claim to sympathy; the woman who shrieks is infinitely attractive; the woman who can accomplish a judicious combination of both is irresistible. I do not blame my brethren, for this sentiment of theirs originates in a natural and heroic vanity; they like to be called on to prove their own superiority—the superiority of muscle and form which Nature has given them—the superiority of mind to which educational training has

assisted them. It is sweet and pleasant to protect a creature whom they love ; and they can scarcely pardon an independence which dispenses with a parade of manly supremacy ; perchance, in his heart, General Lavalette never forgave Madame, his wife, for taking his place in the Conciergerie ; and if the maid of Saragossa's lover could have seen that lady's method of lamenting his death, he probably would have turned from that avenging face, to adore the bowed head of some little saint, praying for him devoutly by the town altar.

The bye-lane that ran past the Auriel shubberies was a portion of Church Lane, and so Azalea was only half a mile from Auriel when she came in sight of the house which Sally had said was Mr. Douglas's. Topaz at this moment became engaged in a highly interesting discussion with a hedgehog, he barking round it in the hope of provoking it to offer him a vulnerable point

of attack ; the prickly ball declining to unroll itself on the principle that the dog's discomfort was its safety.

Calling off Topaz, and pretending to rebuke him sternly with a hazel switch, served to divert his mistress's mind, and her heart did not beat quite so fast now as she walked up to the garden gate, and began to frame a few words of inquiry by which she might induce Mr. Douglas to see her. Mr. Douglas, however, had little choice in the matter, for his door was wide open ; and when Azalea stood on the threshold, she saw a middle-aged man writing at a table, with his face partially averted from her. The only mode of introduction she dared to venture on was a small apologetic cough ; Topaz walked on boldly and sniffed the stranger's legs with an air of suspicion, and Robert Douglas put down his pen and looked at the intruders.

Was it a fly tripping over his page, or a bird flopping against the pane—was it

the old woman teasing him for orders, or the Squire's son come to announce a holiday in place of a task? Something had disturbed him, and for an instant Douglas ascribed his sense of discomfort to some familiar petty cause. Then his glance fell on a fair-headed little girl, who might have been blown in with the sunbeam that streamed through his door, so noiseless had been her approach; so sunny was her aspect. He looked at her wonderingly.

"What do you want?" he said.

His tone was harsh, and Azalea pulled a rose-leaf to pieces between her fingers before she could find her voice.

"If you please, I want——." She began.

"Yes."

"I want——"

"Won't you sit down?" Mr. Douglas suggested, pushing a chair towards her.

Azalea accepted the courtesy gratefully. She was not tired, but she was shaking

with nervousness. Unfortunately the change of position did not bring increase of courage.

“Yes; what is it?” Mr. Douglas demanded once more. This time his voice seemed harsher, and he glanced at his open book. Azalea saw and interpreted the look aright. “He wants me to go,” she thought piteously, “and I haven’t said anything yet.” In her perplexity and confusion, she kicked her chair vigorously. Mr. Douglas searched under the table, and perceiving that the irritating noise was caused by her legs, he looked at them imploringly and said :

“Don’t.”

They stopped immediately, and Azalea muttered sullenly : “I want to learn something.”

“Yes.”

“I want to learn everything,” Azalea went on in desperation.

“I want to learn music and drawing,

arithmetic, and French, and Latin, and Greek, and I want you to teach me."

"I do not teach girls," Mr. Douglas said, briefly.

"But I wouldn't be any more troublesome than a boy," Azalea pleaded, "and I do want to get on so ; for it breaks my father's heart, he says, to think that I am not to be taught like other children."

"What are they taught here excepting to sew and to glean ; and why does your father want you to be brought up differently from other children in your rank of life ?"

"I don't know," Azalea said, simply, "excepting it is that I *am* different, you know."

Mr. Douglas, looking at the delicate feet and hands, the refined contour of the head, and the face bright and mutable with intelligence, owned to himself that this child was very dissimilar from the red-cheeked, heavy-faced girls who slouched up the lane every Sunday on their way to church.

"An Olympian amongst swineherds," he said to himself. "A thoroughbred in a Suffolk team! How on earth did she come by these signs of race?"

"Do you know anything already?" he asked.

"Not much," Azalea said, humbly.

He pushed a book towards her. "See if you can learn half a page while I finish what I am about. Now, don't talk, but do what I tell you: if I find you to be intelligent, I may consent to help you; but another fool would be the death of me." With which compliment to his absent pupils, Mr. Douglas bowed his head again over his book, checking with a gesture Azalea's effort to explain to him that she had got far beyond the first page of the Latin grammar, and that he was not testing her abilities fairly in requesting her to learn the primary rules. She repeated her task mechanically to herself to be quite certain of her perfect acquaintance with it, and then she

watched the shadows blowing along the hedgerow opposite the window, and wished she might follow the track of those quick birds who pecked little patches in the cherries in the garden, and then waved away over the cornfields until they became dim, restless specks over the bosom of the distant hills. For a while the silence was unbroken in the little room. The dog lay curled up in the sun ; the child sat motionless in the flickering light and shadow that played through the casement ; and the man pondered over the mysteries of language which had been sound in the mouths of strange generations who have left to Time no heritage save rich barbaric symbols and strange characters traced on broken fragments of stone. Presently a few heavy drops splashed through the thick, warm air. These were succeeded by others, and a fresh scent of rain began to blow through the rose-trees at the window. Then a low peal of thunder rolled over the meadows,

and a sharp vivid streak of pale fire played for an instant across the bosom of a black cloud. The cloud grew darker and the peals louder and fuller, until the lightning streaks, and the thunderous volleys seemed to awe every living thing to silence. The birds ceased to sing, but fluttered uneasily round the fluffy nests, where their fledglings stared with bright curious eyes at the raindrops pattering through their green roof of leaves. The kine herded together under the trees, while their less sedate companions, the horses, galloped wildly round the meadow at every fresh blast of the storm.

Azalea looked calmly out on the angry confusion of the elements—the hurrying clouds streaked by quick flashes of fire, the sullen grandeur of the thunder crashing overhead in an ecstasy of wrath, and then rolling away into sullen murmurs over the echoing hills,—all inspired her with a sort of awed delight.

“Are you not afraid of the storm?” Douglas asked, looking up from his work on Etruscan relics, his eyes somewhat dazzled by the frequent-recurring flashes.

“Not now,” Azalea answered; “I used to be when I was little, you know.”

“That was a long while ago,” Douglas suggested, amusedly. “And why were you afraid then?”

“I only used to be afraid when I had done anything wrong—when I had stolen the best apples, and told daddy the wasps had eaten them, or lost the key of the store-room; then if a storm came I was dreadfully frightened, and thought God was speaking his anger to me through the clouds.”

“And now?”

“Oh! now I don’t do anything wrong,” she said with audacious simplicity. “I have all the apples I want, and there isn’t a key to the store-room.”

“Can you do your lesson?”

“Yes.”

“Then let us get it over,” Douglas said, weariedly.

Azalea rendered up her grammar in a tremor of hope and fear—hope that she might attain her object, and fear lest by some treacherous failure of memory she might blunder where she sought to be most certain of success. She felt, too, that desire for progression, that nervous exaltation, which thrills him who sets out glad of heart and elastic of limb to scale an Alpine height; while Douglas’ feelings resembled rather those of the guide whose eyes are sickened by the perpetual recurrence of familiar paths, and whose arms have grown weary in impelling the traveller’s steps when the latter faints with exhaustion or succumbs before difficulties.

Douglas was, however, pleased and astonished at the extent of the child’s acquirements and at the lucidity of her understanding. He soon found that it was

unnecessary to confine her attention only to the grammar. "To-morrow we will begin Virgil," he said, when the lesson was finished.

Azalea laughed in her heart, feeling that the victory was won, and that her father need suffer no further uneasiness concerning her education.

"Will your father call and see me?"  
Douglas began.

"He is a cripple, from paralysis," interrupted the girl, sadly.

She was surprised by the look of tender pity that beamed over her companion's rugged face—a look so soft and plaintive that for an instant the harsh features and deep-set eyes seemed transformed into something like beauty.

"I will come to-morrow," he said briefly.

The light passed away from his eyes as he turned once more to his books, and Azalea thought she must have been mis-

taken in fancying that he looked almost handsome just now.

"I live up there at Auriel," she said, pointing in the direction of the red gables that peered above a belt of woodland.

Douglas looked out over the yellow, heaving fringe of the corn-fields, heavy-headed and stricken crossways by wet, and shivering in the wind—looked at the low line of the tangled hedgerows—at the purple film of the far woodland, and the dim red house of Auriel towering behind it.

"I shall not forget," he said musingly. "I should like to see Thurstan Mowbray's home. I hope I shall find you alone," he added. "I do not care to meet any more strangers than I can possibly avoid. Have you any friends?"

"I have none."

"I'm glad of it. Good-bye. The rain has ceased, you see."

"Good-bye," Azalea said gaily; and, tucking up her petticoats round her, she

called Topaz and hurried away, her fair hair blown about her face, laughter shining in her eyes and dimpling her soft, baby-looking mouth. It was as if the spirit of beautiful youth had flitted into some old anchorite's gloomy cave, and had danced out again with the free wind and the sun, glad to turn its bright visage away from darkness and sorrow.

Douglas was relieved by her departure. Joy and loveliness were to him what the sight of children are to a barren wife.

The next four years of her life were very sweet to Azalea. The sweetness was so still and subtle, the time ebbed so softly past her untroubled heart, that she herself hardly appreciated the rare worth and beauty of the vanishing hours. In after years she grew wiser in her pain, and would wake from her slumbers with a strange pang of recollection, stretching out her arms in the darkness of night, as if imploring Time to give back to her one

breath of the old flower-scented sunshine—one glimpse of the old innocently sensuous peace that had blessed her in these days. Then she longed with a passionate craving for the faint scent of the water-lilies that starred the dark pond—for the rustle of the ripened apples falling heavily through the pale leaves, with yellow wasps buzzing over the fallen prize—for the cry of the night bird that whispered mysterious plaints through the dense woodlands—for her father's voice—for Topaz's sudden imperative expressions of doggish will. All the dear trifles of her present content which passed unnoticed now, lived clearly in her mind in the cold hereafter when she could no more clutch a remnant of the joys of her youth than the dead can leave darkness and corruption to dance with the village children who prattle over their graves.

At present her happiness was crossed neither by regret nor prescience of trouble. Youth presses on blindly through its swift

bright years, like the true lover who flew over the golden road that led to his mistress's bower without looking right or left. It is only those who have been already shipwrecked that tremble under the shadow of coming clouds and shiver at the whisper of adverse winds.

George Moore was still feeble and helpless, but his willing inertion and sometimes broken speech seemed healthful compared to that old terrible time when his voice and limbs were numbed entirely by the dread gripe of paralysis. He was drifting towards the end, but so soft and gradual was the decay that he scarcely saw the deepening of the shadows. Life was fading from view as light dies away on the bosom of a still lake when the rosy dusk darkens slowly from warm indistinctness to impenetrable gloom.

Douglas's visits were a great solace to the old man. It had been arranged between them that the former should come to

Auriel on those days when Azalea received her lessons. This arrangement was agreeable to Moore, who sat blinking with satisfaction and mumbling inarticulate criticisms on the girl's progress while she construed her Latin and carried such rustic intonation into her French exercises as nearly made her tutor swear with vexation. Douglas himself found it pleasant to quit for a while the low roof and plain whitewashed walls of his cottage for the old-fashioned grandeur of the Manor—grandeur infinitely lovelier to him from being tinged by the romance of decay and silence. He liked to wander through the long corridors and empty chambers when they were flushed by sunset. Then the marble busts that gleamed in the dusky recesses had faint little trembles of light moving round their cold sweet faces, while in the picture galleries the scarlet coats of the Cavaliers glowed as if their breasts were once more facing the light of battle. Through the

windows he looked on broken terraces, urns overturned in long grass; and a fountain where the nymph's curved wrist that had once poised a bowl of translucent water was covered with green mould, while the dry cup contained only a few drops of rain, not more than sufficient to induce a passing swallow to rest its glossy breast for a brief instant against the worn, discoloured edge. The old books collected by a learned ancestor of the Mowbrays were linked together with cobwebs, save where Douglas's hand moved them asunder. The collection was a rich and varied one, but no work dated later than the period when George the Second was king, for the last learned and wealthy member of the Mowbray family had died about that period, and his successor, more intent on reaping than sowing the grain on his estate, added not a single volume to his libraries nor a tree to his park. Rare early specimens of the literature of all countries stood in dusky rows on the shelves, and

Douglas felt pleasure almost akin to enthusiasm during the quiet silent hours he spent in examining their contents. Sometimes Topaz would wander in with his nose up, as if he smelt rats in the air. Sometimes his little mistress came and crouched in a sunny corner, deep in the perusal of some romance borrowed from the shelves of her own sitting-room, where some frivolous female scion of the Mowbrays had left copies of the *Waverley Novels*, ‘*Thaddeus of Warsaw*,’ and other levities of her era. When thus occupied Azalea was as quiet as the statue of the sleeping Psyche in the niche behind her. She grew at length to be a part of those still summer noons in Douglas’s mind, and she never jarred the silence by a harsh tone or a sudden gesture.

“She is really tolerable,” was the first concession Douglas made in her favour; “and if her French accent were not so vile would be a pleasant pupil.” He said this to Moore, who, not hearing him distinctly,

took praise of his darling for granted, and nodding his head, muttered, "Yes, it is beautiful!"

"Perhaps when you were a little boy you didn't know much," Azalea retorted. "French don't come by nature."

But his teaching, if harsh, was salutary. The French soon progressed more fluently.

"As to the dead languages," Douglas said, sadly, "I only wish the parson's boys were like her. If she goes on like this she will be a good double-first spoilt."

Unconsciously to himself, he began to feel the day grow brighter towards the hour of his visit to Auriel. It was something for this desolate man to know that there were yet two faces in the world that gladdened at his approach. By degrees the dim red towers began to look like home to him as he neared them in his daily walks. The bye path across the fields that led from the distant village to Auriel had been so little frequented that the corn

grew thickly up to the very verge of the ditches, and mixed with the long trailing brambles of the hedgerows. In the autumn noons Douglas lingered to watch the butterflies flit over the golden floats of wheat—to hear the dull, sweet tones of distant church bells vibrate through the dreamy silence until the last echo died away over the gleaming fringes of far-off fields. Here the bruised honeysuckle was sweet under his tread ; the fragile hedge-blossoms fluttered away from their stems as he brushed past them ; Nature's voice, low-toned and melodious, spoke in the hum of insects, the murmurous coo of wood-doves, the stir of the bearded corn, as it bowed to the warm breath of the summer wind.

As he paused to enjoy the mellow richness of earth's ripest, sweetest hours, he felt something of the calm of these blooming solitudes enter into his heart—something which, if not content, was at least peace.

When the noiseless blossom - dropping summer was succeeded by snow and frost Douglas did not linger by the frozen ditches and stiffened briars, but pressed on quickly to Auriel. There was yet summer in his heart when he saw old Moore's feeble pleasure at his approach, and observed Azalea's eager face smiling welcome on him through the congealed panes as he came down the path.

Four years passed away noiselessly to these three oddly - assorted companions ; outside their lives the great world was rushing along in its mighty stream of noisy joy and shrill pain. The cities were filled with feasting and dancing—with rumours of war and prattle of fashions. Great political changes, altered the face of established laws ; national sorrow and national triumph made sore or glad the hearts of multitudes ; but the echoes of the world's sympathies did not penetrate to Auriel.

Azalea learned to speak pure English and

tolerable French. She grew attached to her tutor, and with feminine tact she did her little best to lighten the cloud on his life. He was not happy, she was sure of that; for although he rarely spoke harshly now, or frowned at her as he did on the day they first met, still he never sang as she did—never laughed like her at the predatory antics of the magpie or the blithe gambols of the kitten.

It was not that Douglas made any affectation of melancholy, but he was like a prisoner whose arms have been bound for so long they know not what use to make of freedom. It is not easy for a man of his age, crushed in spirit and embittered by life-long failure, to lift up his voice in the little aimless songs of joy that bubble up on youth's lips. He could direct Azalea's studies, and sympathize with her earnest enthusiasm when directed towards the acquisition of knowledge; but he found it hard to restrain his impatience when the girl

would suddenly upset the Euripides and fling Sophocles to the ground in her impetuous pursuit of Topaz, as the latter disappeared in a quiver of doggish agitation to make vindictive war on the kitten.

Meanwhile old Moore was slowly dying, and they saw it not, neither did they see Azalea was growing into a beautiful young woman. At the end of four years, when she was seventeen, Lord Orme and his family returned to take up their permanent residence once more in England, as the health of the Hon. Rosa Orme was now thoroughly re-established.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE ORMES AGAIN.

I HAVE spoken before of Lord Orme's house in Brighton. I have now to introduce you to the old baronial residence of the Ormes, which was also situated in Sussex, but it stood far away from the gay glare of the town on a wild-looking range of downs. From the upper windows you could detect a gleam of sea shining beyond the furthest float of hills ; but except this, and the sheep that made so many dappled lights down the shadowed valleys, there was little else to break the flowing monotony of the view.

When the house was unoccupied by the family, the sheep would crowd up round the walls and poke their innocent noses against the nail-studded doors ; there was no fence-work to separate the front part of the house from the downs—no trees to cast flickering shadows down the sides of the stately towers. In lonely grandeur the massive pile breasted hot suns and rushing winds, and beyond the rude magnificence of its proportions there was little to admire in the exterior of Orme Castle.

“ A dreadfully dull place,” the Misses Orme pronounced the home of their fore-fathers to be.

“ Reminded her of pirates,” Miss Slater averred, with an affected shiver.

Upon which Conrad punished her by asking her if she would not like to become “ the windy bride of a corsair ;” which remarkable form of invitation he had discovered in an old drama of Lord Thurlow’s.

Conrad's holidays had not begun when the Ormes returned from abroad.

"Thank heaven for that," Miss Slater said fervently: he was to the poor governess what the fly was to Io. When she read morning prayers, and prayed for health and happiness for all the members of the household, she could not help glaring evilly at that terrible boy, whose curly head, looking like the crest of a pert cockatoo, bobbed solemnly up and down, keeping time with her somewhat sing-song intonation; "And look kindly on our evil doings," she chanted, looking fixedly at the obnoxious movement, but she could not herself yield the forgiveness she petitioned for.

It was on a summer's evening when the family returned home; after the bustle of arrival had subsided, the inmates wandered helplessly about the house, like strange cats that are not sufficiently at home to clean their feet and go through all

the licking and purrings incidental to catish toilettes.

The luggage had not arrived, so the ladies'-maids could not commence their offices. The house looked desolate and strange; no familiar occupations were about, with which the girls could employ themselves. Lord Orme wished to write some letters, but his inkstands were serving as cemeteries for deceased flies, and his pens and paper were locked up in his dispatch-box. Miss Slater longed for tea, but the female domestics had only just obtained some for themselves, and utterly declined to pay any attention to the angry vibration of the bells until their own requirements were satisfied.

After dinner the girls strolled out on the sloping lawn at the back of the house and there held counsel over their plans for the future. Miss Slater sat down in the drawing-room and looked sentimentally at Lord Orme and Lord Orme went to sleep.

Rosa and Amelia had improved in appearance since the day when they walked like little angular automata under the presiding jerks of Miss Slater's hand.

Rosa was black-eyed and tall : she had one of those figures over which milliners rejoice—"nice and straight, no trouble at all to fit," her dressmaker said ; her lady friends called her "so very distinguished-looking." I have observed that when a young lady, wealthy and high-born, lacks the feminine loveliness to which her rank and other advantages justly entitle her, the female jackals of her court generally disarm criticism by the emphasis with which they proclaim her to be "distinguished;" that is, supposing the object of their admiration is sufficiently large and lanky-looking to merit the appellation ; if she be short and fat they are reduced to the suggestion that she is "so sweet."

Amelia Orme would have come into the latter category. She was rather below the

middle height, had an aquiline nose and a heavy face and throat; her eyes were hazel, and were ordinarily placid in expression; but when she was angered, a wicked low cunning look gleamed up in their sullen depths. She was full and thick in figure; her hair was a burnished brown, and she had a great quantity of it.

Amelia was sullen and phlegmatic. Rosa was lively and irritative. When the two sisters quarrelled, Rosa had the advantage on her side at the commencement of the warfare, but ultimately the victory remained with Amelia. Rosa exhausted her rage in angry exclamations, withering sarcasm, and quick hot tears; on these occasions her eyes danced, her voice shook, and her nose got red.

Amelia stiffened into the most impenetrable sullenness; her face was calm as an Egyptian idol's, and heavy in its anger like a storm-lurid cloud. In many respects she was amiable. She loved Rosa after her

own fashion. She never gratuitously irritated Miss Slater, and she was solemnly respectful to her father.

But of the two I rather think he preferred Rosa, who was waspish and impertinent. In her most agreeable moods Amelia was monotonous, and she was as unresponsive to demands for sympathy as a stone wall is to the electric flash that plays over it in times of storm.

The sisters looked almost pretty as they stood together in the soft gloom of this autumn evening, attired in flowing white dresses, and with Roman scarves twisted about their shoulders. Around them was a bold expanse of grass downs flushed by sunset. A fresh sea wind blew over the high peaks, and all the hills were musical with the gentle tribulation of sheep-bells. Amelia looked pensively on the innocent creatures whose lives are one harmless continual nibble, and sighed.

"I haven't tasted south-down mutton for ages," she said.

Then the two talked of the grand ball papa was to give soon, and of the dresses they determined to wear, and of the partners they hoped to secure. It was to be their first appearance in society as grown-up young ladies, and their expectations of the result were somewhat extravagant.

"Do you think the Duke of Grand-acres will propose for me that night?" sharp-eyed Rosa said, alluding to an unmarried country magnate.

"Not that night, perhaps," Amelia said, slowly. "Perhaps he'll do it when he calls next day. For my part, I shouldn't think of marrying anything less than twenty thousand a year. I don't so much care for landed estates; there are often so many mortgages round the corner."

Then they discussed the number and

class of people who were to receive invitations.

"I suppose we must ask that Lady Diana," Rosa said, viciously. "What men can see to admire in a woman of her age I cannot imagine."

"She is two or three and thirty, isn't she?" yawned Amelia.

"Forty, if she's a day," the other answered, emphatically; and Amelia, who was acute enough in some respects, wondered what admirer of Rosa's had wandered from her, lured away by the attractions of that "splendid mirage," as a clever Frenchman once designated Lady Diana Merton.

"My dears," called Lord Orme from the drawing-room window, "come in; you will catch cold."

Lord Orme had a vague theory that every one who went out of doors after dinner must necessarily catch cold. He always sat in-doors through all the long mellow summer's evenings. He called the

dew damp, and preferred listening to the thrush through closed windows and drawn curtains.

The Misses Orme obeyed the summons, and shortly afterwards announced themselves to be fatigued, and retired to their bedchamber. Rosa went to bed first, and was just dropping off to sleep, when she happened to glance towards Amelia, who was sitting by the mirror, her hands moving rapidly through her hair, and holding some mysterious instruments which, from the distance, resembled meat skewers. In a moment Rosa was wide awake. Her black eyes looked suspiciously at her sister's proceedings, and she murmured, with emphasis, "Crimps!" Then she sat up in the bed, and stared at Amelia.

"Why are you crimping?" she asked, severely.

Both sisters wore their hair frizzled over the eyes, in the dishevelled Bacchante-like style with which our English virgins now-

a-days disfigure the fair smooth brows of youth. As a rule, in the privacy of home-life, the Misses Orme's waving locks were allowed to return to their normal state of flatness. The hair resented constant torture, and if twisted too often and too much, under the fiery pressure of the tongs, it was apt to come out in handfuls. There were various degrees of frizziness according as the occasion demanded. If a desirable *parti* was to be fascinated, the lady's-maid, under Miss Slater's directions, wrought her young mistress's tresses into a state of marvellous confusion; if only a commoner, with barren prospects, was to be encountered, the governess disdained to assist at her charges' toilettes, and merely a gentle wave redeemed the hair from its ordinary limpness. If any male visitor were expected, the hair was certain to wave to a certain extent; but when the girls believed themselves to be secured against intruders, they rejoiced to escape the nightly irritation

of feeling hard-twisted knobs intervene between their heads and the pillow.

“Whom do you expect to see to-morrow?” Rosa said, with increased severity. And Amelia, looking very conscious, dropped the braid she was manipulating, and muttered—

“I heard papa say that if he went into Brighton to-morrow, and found that the — Dragoons had arrived, he should ask Captain Mowbray and some of the other officers to dinner.”

The treachery stood revealed now the motive for the frizziness was exposed.

“And you would have let me go to sleep without telling me!” Rosa cried, in an accent of deep reproach.

“Your maid has gone to bed with a face-ache,” Amelia answered, abashed, “so she couldn’t do it for you, and it’s only a chance, you know.”

“It must be a good chance for which you would care to take any trouble,” Rosa re-

sponded, spitefully. She jumped out of bed, and sat down before her mirror with a look of determination in her little sharp face. As she was far more energetic and active than her sister she was avenged by producing a more brilliant result than did the latter.

But on the morrow they found that their labour had been wasted ; for when Lord Orme came back from the barracks and encountered his daughters waiting for him at the porch, whither they had flown to meet him with an unusual accession of filial devotion, he told them that the — Dragoons had not yet arrived. They were expected to leave Norwich to-morrow, and as they were going to march by road through Essex to London, they could not arrive at Brighton for some days yet.

“ Captain Mowbray’s home is in Essex, is it not, papa ?” asked Rosa.

“ Yes ; but I do not suppose he has ever seen it since he was a child,” Lord Orme

answered. "It is about as valuable a house to him as an old year's nest to swallows in the spring."

"Why does he not let it?" asked the practical Amelia.

"They will never let it," Lord Orme said, decisively. "They are as proud as Spaniards, and as impecunious. In the courtyards of the Escurial at Madrid the grass springs up thick enough to feed a team of mules; but I imagine that if a heretic hand wished to remove the signs of neglect and disorder, he would be rebuked with, 'Let it be; our grass is better than your hay.' No doubt the Mowbrays think the Auriel owls are worthier occupants of their chimneys than the smoke from a stranger's fire."

"Auriel!" exclaimed Rosa, with a flash of recollection, "that is the name of the place that funny little girl came from. Do you remember her, Amelia? I mean that disagreeable creature papa brought to Brighton just before we went abroad."

"I remember her," Amelia answered, shortly. "She was horrid."

"She must be quite a woman now : I wonder what she is like," pursued Rosa.

"Worse than ever, I should think," the other said, decisively. "At what time do we dine, papa?"

"Not for the next two hours. I wish you would come and read me the 'Times' articles, Amelia ; I shall not sleep happy to-night if I do not know what they are about; and I have such a pain in my eyes I cannot read them myself."

Amelia looked depressed ; it was her way of expressing disapprobation of any proposal that did not please her. Amelia's depression was as sure an index as the weather hand that points to 'cloudy.' Lord Orme turned from her with impatience.

"I'll read them, papa," cried the shrill voice of Rosa. Her father thanked her, doubtfully: he could not well decline the proffer; but as he anticipated, Rosa, after

wading through half a column, gave various impatient twitches to the newspaper, and asked if “ dear papa would not excuse her reading any more for the present as she felt headache coming on.”

Lord Orme said “ Go, go!” and dismissed her. Then, unable to amuse himself, he sat and watched the shadows deepen on the hills, and thought of that other girl of whom Rosa and Amelia were just now speaking so contemptuously.

“ She must be quite a woman now. I wonder what she is like.”

Memory told Lord Orme that if the girl resembled her dead mother she must be very fair to look on.

“ I’ll do her justice one day,” he declared to himself; he had been chafed by the selfish disregard of him shown by the Misses Orme; and we never think so tenderly of those we have wronged as when we are ourselves writhing under similar hurts.

## CHAPTER VII.

## EVE EATS HER APPLE.

It was daybreak at Auriel, and country-bred Azalea awoke as naturally with the dawn as did the quick-eyed swallows who lived in the eaves above her window. She lay still a while, watching the wan sun-streaks lengthen over the brown furrowed upland, and listening to the clump of the farm horses' feet as they trotted down towards the misty water side to drink. It was that pale mysterious hour when the hush of night passing away from the earth, gives place to grey gloom which is as obscure and indistinct in its nature as

a dying man's wanderings ere the babble of his tongue has ceased, and his soul dawned before the brightness of God. The night clouds had rolled away, but day had not yet breathed out its full sense of life and joy ; feeble twitters broke from the leaves, and desultory flutters disturbed their dew-steeped shadows. The steel-grey waters of the lake ; the dark forms of cattle moving stiffly down the meadow ; the mist that clammed the outline of sky and earth together—all was chill uncertainty of aspect.

A few hours later, and the avenue was alive with the cheerful clamour of birds ; the wild fowl dashed its breast down a sunlit stream ; the waterfalls sparkled their mad delight over glistening pebbles ; the warm wind dried the wet-faced roses ; the cat crept out to make her toilette of clean paws and smoothed ears ; and Azalea stood at her window, the freshest and fairest object the morning sun shone on.

"Oh, what a lovely morning it is!" she said as she stood there drinking in breaths of sweet sunshiny air.

When she was dressed she walked softly down the stairs so as not to disturb Moore, and consulted the worn face of the old clock that stood in the hall. It was too early to busy herself in the sitting-room yet; to go through her little duties of dusting and arranging the massive furniture and preparing breakfast. Her father slept overhead, and the light doubtful slumbers of age are easily disturbed; so Azalea took the large garden basket off its peg and decided to go out and gather some flowers with which to make the dusty old chambers bright when she returned.

She sang to herself as she walked down the path under the cross lights and shadows of the avenue. She was seventeen, her heart unruffled by trouble, her eyes bright with unconcern. She was as free and unfettered of spirit as the wild birds that

caroled noisily above her head, and like them she involuntarily sang out her appreciation of the fresh beauty of the morning.

It was a pity that human sadness should ever abase such a bright face. It was a pity that this girl, as happy and sinless as the dumb companions of her solitude, could not die as she was living now, with God's sunshine blessing her head, and with a soul so pure that she might have gone straight to her mother's breast in paradise without dreading the tender questioning of those celestial eyes.

After a while Azalea paused to contemplate the contents of her basket ; there were lilies of the valley shaking down small dewdrops among the cool green leaves that sheathed their fragrant white bells ; roses of all descriptions, from the luxurious damask to the delicate rose de mot, were heaped promiscuously together, piercing each other's tender petals with their thorns ; bunches of wisteria, sweetest and most

graceful of all the pensile blossoms, hung languidly over the basket's wicker edge; the fleur-de-lys drooped its stately head across the heavy breadth of the peony, and the homely-looking buds of calicanthus shed the influence of their rare perfume over all.

"Oh!" said Azalea, plunging her little face into the dewy masses of blossom with an expression of ecstatic enjoyment, "I love them."

Then she looked wistfully at the hedgerow which divided the shrubberies from that lane which led to the little village of Auriel.

"If I get over there I can gather some ferns."

Getting over there implied climbing to the summit of a steep bank, forcing herself through a barricade of short dense nut boughs, and then clinging to the rough wet sides of an oak tree while she slipped down into the ditch on the opposite side.

She hesitated for a moment, fearing the

contingencies of scratched hands and torn clothes. She scrambled up a few steps and peeped over at the temptation below.

That ditch contained beauties scarcely inferior to the gay-hued, rich-scented garden plants which it bounded, and Azalea looked longingly at the thick masses of fern, waving crossways at the foot of the bank with a wild grace all their own.

“I *must* have some,” she thought, “to droop over the sides of the vases.”

She fixed her laden basket between two boughs of the oak, and then clasping one hand round another branch, commenced her descent. She felt her way with her feet until they found a secure root on which to support them, and then she paused.

“If I jump I shall jar my legs, if I slip down I shall scratch them : I don’t much mind that, but the dress is sure to get caught by something or other, and then daddy will say, ‘There you go again, Azalea, always in rags ;’ and I so detest mending

them. If any one were here to give me a hand I could jump easily."

She looked up and down the misty lane, but saw nothing but a jackdaw looking very wise as it dissected its early breakfast.

"If there were but an old woman or a boy."

There was the hem of a dress fluttering in the wind, a stone-picker, some fields distant, and the red neckerchief of a bird-boy, making a bright speck in a far-off hedgerow, but Azalea could not make them hear, nor if they had heard would they have heeded her. She was in that position in which poor undecided mortality so often finds itself; afraid to go on, loth to draw back, and so fain to stay where she was.

"I'll risk it," she said, suddenly; and she was in the act of withdrawing her arm from the friendly branch when a strange sound struck upon her ears.

Something quite different from trill of bird or hum of insect was that quick clang

of notes that rose up between the sweet honeysuckle borders of that quiet lane. There was something plaintive in it too—something harsh like human pain. There was none of the full content of the black bird's note in it.

"What can it be?" wondered Azalea, postponing her jump into the fern bed; "I never heard it before."

If the little girl had gathered up herself, legs, basket, and all, and run back into the woods, where she could hear it no more, it might have been better for her.

She had not long to wait before a solution of the mysterious sounds came in sight, and the solution was even more wondrous than the mystery. Gleaming through the green fringe of the hedgerows, passing in a quick stream of light by misty clusters of woodbine, came a glitter of helmets and a toss of red and white plumes.

From some unexplainable impulse, Azalea made a desperate effort to regain the top

of the bank, but she was too late ; it would have required three or four scrambles to reach her old place ; and not liking to continue the useless struggle, she remained motionless while the procession streamed nearer, and the whole length of path resounded with the tramp of horses' feet.

The green shadows, the dewy lights, all were broken up and patched by vivid red coats ; the dark rapidly-moving forms of the horses, the champ of their bits, the hurried jingle of spurs, the sharp bright lines of steel that hung from the men's left sides—the plumes waving as hearse-like yet festal symbols of death over the bearded faces that showed beneath the sharp-pointed helms,—all passed as a brilliant but yet awful picture before Azalea's amazed eyes.

The whole of this peaceful, grass-grown, elm-shadowed road was stirred by the war-like commotion. The sheep in the opposite field huddled away up the pasture, and

then turned and looked at the intruders with calm, dewy-eyed wonder; the daisies under foot, which had lived unscathed under the slow tread of lazy cart-horses, were crushed to the ground by the merciless precision of those serried lines of tramping hoofs; the jackdaw hopped out of the path and looked wise on the safe side of the hedge. All the little harmless flutters of life that were wont to make innocent music in this quiet spot were overpowered by the gay clangour of the martial cavalcade that swept like a flame of fire through the densely-shadowed lane.

As the tramp and the jingle drew nearer Azalea involuntarily tightened her hold on the branch overhead, and in so doing dislodged the basket of flowers, already top-heavy with its fragrant burthen. Over it turned, and roses and lilies, *fleur-de-lys* and wisteria, showered down on to Azalea's head, shoulders, and feet. One plump rose descended on her shoes, and then fell to

pieces—one bunch of the fragile wisteria lingered lovingly near her ear. The fleur-de-lys shook yellow powder on to her hands, and then slipped down to the ditch ; indeed the ferns below were oppressed by a perfect avalanche of blossoms.

Azalea scarcely heeded the catastrophe ; her violet eyes were filled with wonder at the advancing spectacle ; yet when the troop of horsemen came nearer she shrank as far as she could behind the shadow of the oak, and fervently wished that she could escape up its branches as quickly as that deft squirrel that was curling up its tail at a breezy altitude of some dozen boughs nearer the sky.

The reader will understand that a cavalry regiment was moving through Essex *en route* to another county, and that a troop which had been billeted at an adjacent village during the night were now on the march again, passing by the Auriel estate as the shortest cut to the high roads. A bustle on

arriving and departing—a friendly smoke overnight with the innkeeper—a champing of many horses' mouths in the stables—a swing into the saddle when the early rime still clings to wallflower and cottage latch—a kiss to the innkeeper's daughter watching them wistfully over the gate—such is the general result of a troop of soldiers' swallow-like descent into rustic Arcadias; “only this and nothing more.” The girl at the gate may feel soft-eyed when she thinks of that big moustache that has just now brushed her cheek; may feel her heart beat at the next flutter of red she espies in the hedgerow; but a few hours later will find her romping with Joe on the green, or quarrelling with her intimates over the wash-tub. Poverty is so practical it does not admit of wasting time in sentiment; at least the injurious self-torture engendered by luxury is spared to the hewers of wood and drawers of water. There is no space for it when mouths have to be

filled and limbs clothed by dint of sheer exertion.

The reader will understand all this; but he or she may also comprehend that to the eyes of a girl like Azalea this was far from being anything so commonplace as a troop of horse moving from one barrack to another. To her it was a magnificent poem, and those red coats and dancing plumes were the emblems of valour and death. She had never seen living soldiers before, but she had read of their deeds, and learned to reverence the names of those our country's records have delighted to honour. There must have been inherited chivalry in her blood, or it would not have flushed her cheek so brightly as she followed the rush of plumes with her eyes, and thought that she too would like to die amidst the red light of battle and the sombrous roll of drums. She was only seventeen, so do not despise her; you or I might feel that death would be as un-

pleasant to meet in the uproar of battle as in the drear solitude of a wind-blown moor; but youth may be permitted to have its delusions—to fancy that bright colours and joyous music may elevate the soul above mortal pangs and disenthral it from mortal terrors. Such delusions are the blossoms of life. They will fall soon enough; so we will not shake the tree.

Azalea's unpractised eyes (confused as they were by the novelty of the scene) did not detect that one of the troop was more richly dressed than the others; that it was real gold lace that gleamed on his coat; and that the delicacy of gentle breeding showed in a fairer skin and silkier moustache than was owned by the rest of his companions.

This was the officer in command, Captain Thurstan Mowbray; and this gentleman had never ceased yawning from the time of his leaving the village hostelry until he came opposite the Auriel woods. Then the

languor in his face gave way to interest as he let his eyes rove over the variously-tinted waves of foliage, and noted the old red gables of the house visible through the breaks in the woodland. Sometimes he could see the shimmer of a sunlit casement, or followed with his gaze the herds of deer passing in line over the misty breadths of pasture.

“A beautiful old place!” he murmured. “To think that there should be no smoke from those chimneys. I dare say they have been stuffed with marten’s nests for these last dozen years. Oh, if one had but money!”

The horses tramped on, the little girl in her niche following them with adoring eyes. If she could only have heard what the commander of that grand-looking party was sighing out between his moustache her exalted estimate of one of the brilliant throng would have been slightly lowered.

“Oh, if one had but money!” No reference to splendid deeds of heroism—to old banners won in Spain—to lives willingly and gloriously yielded ‘midst rolls of smoke and clang of arms—came from that perplexed-looking young officer, whose greatest enemy was his tailor, and who had never led a forlorn hope against any fortress more impregnable than a certain office in Craig’s Court.

The colour, the noise, the bronzed faces had passed Azalea’s dazzled eyes, and were growing dimmer and indistinct far down the lane, when Captain Mowbray took it into his head to turn round in his saddle and give a last look at his father’s deserted home. In scanning the broken palings overrun with ivy, and wondering how much money it would take to uplift and straighten their time-warped sides, his eyes fell on the oak, and then on the living creature clinging to its side. Even at this distance he saw the gleam of fair hair; and

if there was one thing in woman more attractive than another to Captain Mowbray, it was fairness.

His bold dark eyes flashed, and his handsome face woke into new life in an instant. A quick glance at the immovable faces of his companions showed him that he was alone in his discovery. The men had taken a cursory glance at the pretty wild flowers that bloomed down the bank, but it was reserved for their officer to detect the rare specimens that were still clinging to Azalea's feet and shoulders.

"I believe—I am almost sure—she is pretty. I'll go and have a look at her."

What else could you expect from a young gentleman who had been wearilying away so many uninteresting hours on country roads and among ugly rustic faces since he left his last gay quarters? He hailed this apparition as an especial kindly interpolation of Fortune on his behalf. He was as pleased as the boy diverted from the

tedium of a walk to school by the sudden rapture of starting and pursuing a wild rabbit.

Captain Mowbray waited until his troop had passed from under the last elm that shaded the lane, and then, turning his horse, he galloped back in the direction of the oak.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## WHAT IS THE HARM ?

MEN and horses were gone ; but the stir of their presence lingered a while in the vacant path. The birds had not recovered their confidence in the lower twigs of their homes ; and Azalea's ears were still full of the music of their movement. The last plume had nodded away into the clear sunshine of the high-road ere the girl be-thought herself of regaining her flowers, and returning home. She had bared her pretty round arms, the better to preserve her sleeves, and was about to drop down into the soft herbage below, when the

sound of horses' hoofs made her pause and tremble.

Was the beautiful dream coming back again? Was she once more to gaze on that scintillating line of gorgeous gold and crimson? She looked down the lane, and, to her surprise, saw not all, only one of the number, coming towards her, making, even by himself, a blaze of colour in those cool green shadows. In an instant he was opposite to her. The horse was checked and turned unceremoniously loose. The latter made no attempt at flight, but quietly dropped his heavily-caparisoned head into the luscious depths of dewy grass, while the rider stood motionless, surprised into momentary stillness by the charm of the picture before him.

“A dryad, by Jove!” the captain remarked afterwards, with hazy reminiscences of his schoolboy studies in Lemprière. “One of those creatures that live always up a tree.”

Azalea stood with scared eyes and beating heart, surveying the intruder. She had become aware of something more than a red coat and gleaming helmet. She felt, rather than saw, the big brown eyes that looked up at her face with somewhat of entreaty in their bold fire. In one brief second the pleading eyes, the moustached face, the bright apparel, the dim joy of the early morning, all were blended and burnt indelibly into her memory. She knew then that she could never forget it—that even in the grey twilight that foreruns death, that face and that hour would live distinctly in her heart.

Captain Mowbray was, as we have said, awed into inaction for an instant by the girl's exceeding grace of face and outline. Then, his time being short, and the sounds of his troopers' horses already sounding fainter down the distant highway, he caught hold of a projecting branch, and swinging himself up to Azalea's side, sud-

denly clasped her close to his breast, swept his brown moustache over her delicate cheeks, kissed her mouth twice, and then dropped down as quickly on to the sward below, jumped into his saddle, with the sting of a delicate hand and arm flushing his face, and a gay laugh on his red lips.

She had had no time for outcry or remonstrance. She had struck her little hand with all her force against the audacious face that dared to press so near her own. There was no time for set speech or any other display of maidenly dignity. She struck out her hands from a purely animal instinct of self-defence; but her captor hardly felt the blow, excepting as a pleasant reminder of the kiss which had preceded it. It was as if a poor wood-pigeon was fluttering and pecking its soft bill against Captain Mowbray's hand.

“I will come again,” he called out, as he swept past her. “I'll have another kiss of you, darling, before long.”

Still laughing and waving his hand, he vanished out of sight.

Poor Azalea did not gather up her fallen flowers; they withered away in the dank ditch below many days after the fair morning on which they were plucked. She sat down among the nut-boughs, and cried bitterly. A brand of shame seemed to be scorching her lips.

"I can never, never tell daddy, or Mr. Douglas," she thought. Then she wept afresh, and looked reproachfully at her cotton dress.

"If I were only better dressed, and sat up stiff in a drawing-room, like Rosa Orme, this would never have happened. I will never look at a soldier again. How dared he to treat me so? I will never forgive him as long as I live. It would have served him rightly if I had killed him."

Her eyes flashed through her tears, and her face looked quite vindictive at the idea of vengeance. In her heart she classed the

stranger with some of the worst villains among her acquaintances in fiction. She decided that his offence was unpardonable, and with her face dark and stern, she retraced her steps towards the house.

A thousand schemes for abasing her enemy flitted through her busy brain as she moved hastily through the paths, the fire in her thoughts lending unconscious impetus to her movements. If he came again she would pass him with haughty unconcern ; but then he might ignore the haughtiness, and repeat the offence. She would meet him in that blue merino dress her daddy had lately purchased for her, and greet him with a cold bow, and a scornful, averted face ; or she would go out with an old-fashioned dagger (she rejected the idea of the garden-knife, which was practically sharper, as being too prosaic an implement of vengeance), and strike him to the heart through all that bulwark of red and gold.

A woman of the world would have made

allowances for Captain Mowbray — have taken into consideration his temptation, the dearth of pretty faces between Norwich and Auriel, and, above all, his unavoidable haste, which precluded his waiting to express apology or regret ; but Azalea only felt that an enemy had struck a blow at the native modesty in which her thoughts had hitherto rested in as sacred security as flowers in a Madonna's shrine. She had been sovereign of undivided empire in Dreamland. The aspiring ambition of youth made her ever assume the highest place among those ideal personages who thronged round her in imagination. Practically, too, she was a little queen — the adored of old Moore's failing eyes — the worshipped of his heart — the empress of hundreds of living things who fluttered to her at the beck of her finger, and the coo of her soft voice ! Had she not reason to rebel at finding out this morning that she was but an ordinary little mortal who had

been picked up and kissed by a strange soldier. She did not get away from that morning hour all day. All the noon was morning to her. There was ever the grey film of dawn in the air, and the brown eyes pursuing her wherever she turned. They were her secret shame and disgrace. Her cheek flushed and her eyes lowered at their memory. Yet when she fell asleep that night she repeated softly to herself, "I shall come again;" and in her voice was a thrill of something which was not all anger.

The next afternoon, when Douglas came as usual to Auriel, Azalea did not meet him in the avenue as had been her wont. He missed the bright face and the eager welcome of voice and hand, and felt annoyed at their absence.

"I suppose her father is requiring her services more than usual to-day," he thought; but when he reached the house he found old Moore sitting puffing away at his pipe outside the door, looking very

happy in the clouds of smoke and in the contemplation of a favourite beagle bitch that was stretched extended in the sun tranced in a voluptuous inertness from which not all the velvety bitings of four soft-lipped puppies could arouse her.

“Ain’t they beauties?” Moore said, complacently referring to the fat pink-nosed creatures at his feet. “I said to Azalea, ‘We musn’t keep ’em all, the mother’ll never be able to bring them up;’ but Azalea laughed and said, ‘Don’t you think Him that makes young things knows best about that;’ and then she wouldn’t have them killed at first because they were blind, and it seemed cowardly to take advantage of their not seeing, and suddenly souse out their little lives in a pool of cold water; and when they opened their eyes she said they looked at her imploringly, and she couldn’t have them hurt; not but what I think she was mistaken there, for I notice that when their eyes first open they don’t

look up or down, but just in a straight level, as if Nature didn't want them to stare at anything but the mother's teats until they got stronger. They'll make beautiful dogs," the old man added, with that proud satisfaction which every human being appears to take in things of his own rearing; from the street lad who prophecies that whole hecatombs of rats will fall victims to the prowess of his mongrel terrier when it grows to the age of rat-nipping discretion, to the breeder of a thoroughbred horse, who thoroughly believes that an embryo Derby winner exists in the uncouth foal that kicks up its gawky legs in the paddock; from these to the human mother stirred by tremulous joy and mighty pride in her first-born—do we not all think that our young crows will possess, if not the pure fairness of the dove, at least the soaring attributes of the eagle?

"But where is Azalea?" Douglas asked impatiently.

"Daresay she's gone to pick up some plums in the kitchen garden. I said I should like some made into a pudding to-day. I can't eat anything but soft things now—haven't got any teeth, you know. I've often thought, Mr. Douglas, that when Eve, woman-like, did the only thing she was told not to, and ate that 'crude apple,' she hurt her teeth and sent us down toothache among other curses."

Douglas wandered away to the study where he ordinarily read with Azalea.

"Not here," he muttered, discontentedly; "I hate unpunctuality."

He sat down to a table near the window, where his own manuscripts were placed. He did a great deal of his work at Auriel now. The well-stored libraries afforded him greater facilities for study and reference than he could possibly find in his own limited collection of books; and the atmosphere of romance that haunted the old place was in itself a stimulus to imagi-

nation. The summer winds that blew through the open windows stirred into motion a thousand quaint fancies wrought in the faded hangings. Grotesque faces laughed and wept in the perpetual shadow of brown oak carving. Lovely women trailed their draperies, and noble gentlemen clashed their swords through the dim corridors. There were also two children that belonged to the place—a little girl who sat in a picture near the door, and whose stiff bodice and formal sash were in odd contrast with her baby face and dimpled arms, and a boy, a truculent warrior, aged eight, whose brown hair tumbled in loving profusion over his fierce red coat, while his small fingers were clenched over a mimic weapon of death. Azalea used to dream, when she was a child, that the girl, who was all sash and dimples, and the boy, who was all curls and coat, slipped out of the frame while their parents slept, and danced minuets together in the dusky twilight.

In dreamland when the probable and impossible are so mysteriously fused, she was not troubled by the anachronism that the girl lived two centuries later than the boy; and for matter of that in ghostly realms, the difference of a hundred years or so is not likely to disturb ghostly friendships. The spirit of the place breathed of dream-like mystery and gorgeous decay.

“I am hundreds of years old, it whispered; none but nobles with powdered hair bow in my salons or talk stately sentiment to their mistresses on the grass-grown terraces. I am centuries old; do you not see it in my dusty china vases, transparent as a frail shell, and rarer than precious gems; in my ancient manuscripts traced over by hands that were dust with the worms four generations ago. I am dying, but I am royal even while moribund; do not disturb the sanctity of my peace—do not unveil my fading features to the noisy scorn of modern life. Above all, let not any touch ruder than the

wind clang the rusty shields which our forefathers made famous in Palestine."

As a rule, Douglas rejoiced to yield himself up to the thrall of fancies like these, but to-day he felt his mood to be one that jarred against the softness of the hour.

"I am getting to be a methodical old man, I suppose," he thought, half-smiling, half-vexed at his own incomprehensible irritation, "but the fact is, I am put out by not beginning the day in the usual manner. I shall go and look for that girl and get it over, and then I shall be settled in my mind."

That which was to be got over was a long philosophical dissertation, of which Azalea was bound to explain the substance, and to expatiate on the arguments to be deduced therefrom; this, and a lesson in Italian, constituted her task for to-day. As Douglas left the room in pursuance of his intention to seek Azalea, he saw the reflection, in an opposite mirror, of his long,

ungainly figure surmounted by the square forehead shaded by a mass of grey hair.

“Who would have thought that I was ever rather a fine fellow?” he said, with a little touch of self-pity and contempt, as, shrinking away from the glass, he passed out at the porch. “I’ll go to the garden.”

The old garden had once been trimly kept; the peaches had glowed in sumptuous profusion on the walls. The dahlias had kept stately ward in the flower-beds, separated from the golden gravel paths by the severe lines of the box border, but now the gravel was obscured by moss and long grasses. The stricken stems of the hollyhocks had, in many cases, fallen helplessly over their prescribed margin, and the crimson blossoms glowed through the soft green shadows of tall nettles; as for the wall-fruits, they were so concealed by the untrained exuberance of their foliage, that none but the quick-eyed birds knew where to discover and peck out the first

tempting morsel that grew red and ripe in the sun. To-day the whole garden was sleeping in the slumbrous noon. The lilies drooped their fair heads in the hot drowsy air; the convolvuli relaxed their tenacious hold of the rose-trees, and trailed so languidly round the prisoned stems, that had not the red blossoms been inert and heavy with over bloom they might have waved themselves free of their lithe enemies.

Douglas found Azalea under the plum-tree, but she, too, seemed infected by the atmospheric languor, for the plums were lying round her untouched; the misty bloom still veiling their sun-scorched sides, save where the bruise of their fall or the trace of a hungry wasp had broken the purple skins. Douglas paused for a moment, and looked at the picture before him—so full of deep repose—so lovely with soft-breathed peace. What was this restlessness within him? What was this trouble

in his eyes as they dwelt on the girl's fair face and gleaming hair?

She was leaning against the smooth trunk of the tree, gazing drearily at the old crumbling wall opposite, as though her thoughts were wandering far away over its wild summit, floating like the free ether beyond even the solitude of this lonely place. She was roused from her reverie by hearing Douglas step near her and went towards him blushing and smiling.

"Oh!" she said, "I had no idea it was so late, Mr. Robert. I should have been out to meet you had I known it was near your hour for coming."

Again Douglas felt irritated.

"Don't call me Mr. Robert," he said, testily.

"Well, then, Robert. Only it seems so impertinent for me to call you Robert—you who are——"

"So much older than yourself, I suppose you mean," he interrupted.

“Not only that, but so superior,” Azalea answered, simply.

There was silence between them for a few moments; then Douglas spoke again:

“Have you learnt the task I gave you yesterday?”

“Yes—no—that is to say, I don’t quite know. I looked at it,” she pleaded apologetically, seeing a gleam of displeasure in his grey eyes.

“I never knew you negligent before,” he said, harshly. “I will leave you now, and return to my own work.”

He rose to go, and she followed him at a distance, meek-eyed, like a dog depressed by its master’s rebuke. Presently she curled her little fingers round his arm.

“Please forgive me,” she said, penitently. “I will study hard to-day.”

Her touch seemed to thrill from his wrist to his very heart. He looked down on her, his eyes glorified by a light she had never seen in them before.

"I—I—of course I forgive you," he stammered; "but——"

Then he broke from her abruptly, and left her alone in the narrow path, wondering and confused.

"How very strange he is to-day," she thought. "But I must go back to the tree; for, after all, I forgot to pick up the plums for daddy's pudding."

Neither tutor nor pupil made much progress with their studies to-day. Douglas sat and looked at his manuscript, with his face shadowed by one hand; but the other fell listless by his side, and only a flickering sunbeam moved across the blank whiteness of his paper.

Azalea, crouching down on the window-seat, strove hard to fix her attention on the page before her; but the dahlias nodding in the long grasses outside, and the loud humming of the bluebottle on the pane, singing his own dirge in a spider's web, seemed to possess magnetic attractions for her eyes

and ears. She gave a furtive glance at Douglas, to see if he were noting her inattention. He seemed unconscious even of her presence, so she turned her face to the window once more, and resigned herself to dreamy inertness of thought. It was so pleasant to her, the golden warmth of the noon. She liked to see the soft shadows creep up the lawn, and pass their cool veil over the hot languor of the roses. She revelled in the faint scents of ripe fruits and flowers which haunted the warm air.

“It should always be summer time and afternoon,” she said, softly; and Douglas started at the sound of her voice, as if it had been loud and imperative as a trumpet-call.

He did not speak, however, but followed her glance, and looked out at the sky until the grey clouds of night began to thicken in the north, and the sun glowed in long red flames beyond the western firs.

To her all the murmurous sounds, all the

shifting phases of Nature seemed to convey indistinct possibilities of happiness. Hope, vague but sweet as the wistful music of an *Æolian harp*, whispered in the wind-swayed boughs, and glistened in the golden drifts of clouds that were blown towards the west. To him the autumn evening was full of sadness and desolation. The chill aspect of the lake, covered with dreary-looking patches of weeds ; the quick shadow of the wild-fowl gliding over its breast ; the weird-like trouble of the darkening sky, filled him with ineffable depression. The shadow of a new despair seemed to be looming behind the shadow of the coming night. Like his companion, he would fain have arrested the progress of time at noon-tide ; not because, like her, he revelled in the present, but because he dreaded the hours of the future. Presently Azalea broke the silence :

“ What would you do if any one insulted you ? ” she asked, suddenly ; and as she

spoke, a blush suffused her face, which seemed to Douglas to be only a part of the sunset glow which was streaming over her head. His eyes darkened at her question, and the pain of some old memory whitened his face to more than its usual pallor, as he answered, briefly—

“It depends on what description of insult it was.”

“Supposing that it were a very great insult,” Azalea pursued, in a shy, low voice.

“I should probably revenge myself, and repent my revenge all my life,” Douglas said, sadly. “But why need you ask such a question, Azalea?—you who are as secure from insult here as the lonely roses are from being plucked, or the birds captured?”

“Oh, of course,” Azalea answered, confusedly.

Once or twice she had thought she would tell of the marvellous spectacle she had seen in the lane; but the memory of that audacious soldier always checked the impending

confidence. How could she confess to her father or her stern-faced tutor that she had been picked up and kissed by a young soldier, as carelessly as he might pluck a flower and wear it for an instant at his breast? How could she tell them that she was haunted by the memory of a pair of brown eyes, which she would like to meet again if only to abash them with the glory of her indignation?

## CHAPTER IX.

### PORTEANTS.

DOUGLAS left Auriel earlier than usual to-night. His manner was abrupt and confused ; and Azalea, scared by his unwonted sternness, felt something of her childish fear of him return, as she looked at his moody face.

“ I will do better to-morrow,” she said, deprecatingly, when he bade her good-night.

“ It does not matter,” he answered, absently ; and then he disappeared through the misty gloom of the avenue, and she went back to her father, and wondered a

little with him what had made Mr. Douglas so cross to-day.

Meantime Douglas had paused once at the lower gate of the avenue, and looked round with a half-hope that the girl might be yet waving him an adieu. He could not see her; and the closed shutters of the sitting-room excluded from his eyes the solitary light that beamed in the vast and lonely house. The mist and the darkness closed over all, and Douglas hurried home with his heart filled with a bitter feeling, the nature of which he dared not analyse to himself. When he reached his little cottage he sat down in the darkness and solitude of his room, and buried his gaunt face in his hands.

“ Oh!” he moaned, “ surely, of all the bitter sufferings of my life this would be the sharpest!”

“ I will not go there to-day; I will send an excuse,” Douglas said to himself, when he awoke the next morning.

On the previous night he had stifled the

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his mind, he was continually haunted by the aspect of the scenes in which he usually passed these hours of the day. There was the old oak door of the library creaking heavily on its hinge; there was the Virginian creeper drooping down pink-tipped tendrils athwart the diamond-shaped window; there was the quick spider counterfeiting repose on the window-ledge until his buzzing prey came within reach of his long arms. The lights and shadows that were flying across the meadows opposite were playing now in those lonely chambers, where the silence was rarely disturbed save by the twitter of birds or the music of one gentle human voice, and where only one fair face made a living light in their dusky gloom.

At Auriel the day was lapsing with the softness of dreams. He could fancy he heard the old-fashioned clocks chiming away Time in mellow tinkles that, reverberating through the long corridors, sounded like the soft knell of lament for the vanish-

ing hours. He tried only to image to himself non-sentient objects. He tried to limit his sight to the grotesque faces on the tapestry hangings—to shut his ear to all but the low whistle of the bird and the rush of the wind ; but, despite his every effort to compel his thoughts into a prescribed groove, Azalea's hair would gleam in the dusky shadows of those familiar chambers—Azalea's voice would ripple in the summer wind that blew through the window, and her fingers seemed to dimple all over the pages of the book he was reading. He closed the volume impatiently, and walked up and down the room. The low ceilings and narrow space oppressed him with a sense of restraint. He would have liked to thrust the walls asunder with his strong arms, and to trample away the boards under his feet. He passed into the little garden, and vented his restlessness in hurried pacings to and fro on the narrow slip of gravel. He looked up once and saw the

red gables of Auriel shining in the evening sun. Turning abruptly in another direction, he walked away down the fields, and never stopped until he reached a small town about eight miles distant, where he sometimes called for letters at the post-office.

There were none for him to-night; indeed it was very seldom that the seclusion of Douglas' life was intruded on by any communication from the outside world.

He received and read those echoes of the world's hourly life, the newspapers, but like a limpet that clings to its rock, cold and impassive amidst the whirl of waters and the thunderous confusion of storms, he in the dead calm of his self-immolated existence heard without feeling the surge of the outside current.

He did not care to glance at his papers to-night. The records of party clamour, of rumoured war, of the black lists of scandal and crime, would not accord well with the quiet peace of this remote country

village, steeped as it was in the serene splendour of sunset. A few shiny-headed babies played outside the cottages, the opened doors of which revealed occasional glimpses of calm phases of domestic life. Here a woman, with her head bent over her needlework—there an old man, watching the united gambols of a child and a puppy tumbling together over his crutches. Douglas looked wistfully at the faint twinkling lights that were beginning to glimmer in some of the windows. There was “home” for every one but himself, he thought. He saw a day labourer slouching towards one of these lowly homesteads; and the whilom Sybarite and dilettante grudged the wearied hind the rough but cordial greeting that welcomed him to the little dark, close room, of which the most costly ornaments were a solemn-looking white-faced clock and one of those large imitation japan teatrays which occupy in cottages a position ordinarily assumed by

family portraits in loftier mansions, *i.e.*, the place of honour over the chimneypiece.

A fat, unwashed-looking baby contrived with great difficulty to raise the garden latch with the tips of her round fingers, and then ran crowing with delight to the new comer, who, tired as he seemed, was not too weary to toss the chuckling dimpled burthen on to his shoulder. A brown-faced gaunt woman was busying herself within over a (luxury of luxuries, only to be indulged in during the fatigues of harvest time) hot supper, consisting of boiled potatoes and a piece of fat bacon. A bigger girl sat at the door hemming a school sampler. A boy of eight was looking meditatively at the circles his heels described in the dust; an inward trouble caused him to be restless; he was making desperate efforts to learn his Catechism, impelled thereto by the recollection that the vicar's annual school-feast was approaching, and that buns were only for little boys who

could give fluent expression to their orthodoxy. He asked himself readily what his name was, and answered with equal readiness as to his godfathers and godmothers having given him the patronymic of Joey Summers. But after that all was chaos, or rather marbles. Some disreputable little heathens who under no circumstances could ever experience the blessings of buns and conversion were playing marbles under the village oak. The student, gazing at the rolling pebbles with hungry longing in his eyes, felt each article of his faith was blurred out by an illicit desire to join the game of taw.

Douglas, walking swiftly down the wide lane called by courtesy a street, noticed every detail of this homely scene. He felt as a famished bird might that soars over in its flight heaps of golden grain, showered down for the use of domesticated fowls.

That squalid cottage was filled with loveliness for the tired workman. The

house might be small and dark, the chambers closely packed as cells in a beehive, but *there* was refuge from burning suns and biting winds. There was the tendance of hands, rough, it is true, but made gentle by love. There was the sweet human pride of paternity, and that sense of comfort in fellowship, which is in such strange contrast with the solitude of the vast, dark high road we are compelled one day to traverse alone.

The shadow of a rare and undefinable pathos filled Douglas's eyes as he turned his back on the picture of life's fruition and walked in the direction of his silent, desolate abode.

How was it that the name he had striven to repel from his memory all day leapt to his lips simultaneously with the sigh he breathed for unattainable social joys?

"Azalea," he murmured softly; and as his ears heard what his heart had uttered his pale cheeks flushed and his head drooped

lower on his breast. He walked quickly on, as though his hasty footsteps could stamp out the fire that was smouldering in his mind ; passed by the cottage windows, twinkling like multitudes of rubies in the sun ; passed the faded sign of the village inn—an anchor painted on a board which had been riven in two by accidents of time and weather. In a little while the sign wavered in darkness ; the windows reflected inward instead of outward light ; the doors were all closed ; and the peace of night deepened over the quiet town and over the fields through the shadows of which Douglas' tall figure passed a darker moving gloom. He thought with repugnance of his grey-walled cottage standing low in the green glooms of the Auriel lane. He pictured to himself the sullen sky darkening above its brown thatch, the dew-wet roses —their red glow obscured by the dusk—nodding round the small casement. For the first time for three years the dense peace

of his life seemed distasteful to him. He felt a wild desire to stand on rugged declivities, to catch the mad foam of the torrent in his hands, to breathe stormy airs that whirl round the misty summits of snow hills.

There was a strange tumult in his heart which accorded ill with the dull still atmosphere that surrounded him. His thoughts reverted at intervals to the wild freedom of his old life; he fancied that he would be more at ease if he were overpowered by fatigue, or menaced by danger, than he was in the calm security of these civilized solitudes.

He brushed the dew off the woodbine, and trod the trailing bramble under foot in his hasty transit through the fields. In his restlessness he walked as quickly as if one who loved him awaited his return; but when he neared his cottage-door his steps slackened, and he paused at the garden-gate, half dreading to encounter the dark loneliness of his small sitting-room. To his

surprise, he saw that a light was burning there, and as he drew near the window his astonishment increased, for the fumes of a cigar were mingling with the fresh, sweet scent of the roses, and the figure of a man was reclining on a sofa near the narrow casement —a man who, judging by his externals, was by no means the description of visitor you might expect to meet in such a homely dwelling. From his glossy, closely-curled head to his well-fitting boots, he was a perfect representative of a handsome, high-bred-looking Englishman. He was fashionably dressed, but with a fashion that was refined by taste, and there was not a violent or inharmonious tint in his whole attire. He moved his cigar from his lips as Douglas's shadow darkened the path, and called out, in a cheery voice—

“ Halloa ! old fellow, is that you ? What a jolly night it is !”

The voice was familiar, and Douglas, when he stood on his threshold, found him-

self confronted by the bright eyes and genial smile of Thurstan Mowbray.

"I'm on the march," Thurstan explained : "I came past Auriel two mornings ago ; but I couldn't come and see you then, as there was no one else with the men. At the county town I was joined by a brother officer. As soon as I could I got into mufti, and leaving him in command, I came to the railway station. I found that I could get down here so as to spend a couple of hours with you. I was so sold to find you were out. Can you give me something to eat ?"

Douglas looked perplexed.

"I do not know how much bread there may be left," he said, smiling. "I have an excellent barrel of Maçon wine sent to me by a friend in the South of France ; but as to eating — Stay, I will make you some convent eggs."

"What are they ?" Thurstan asked, doubtfully.

"They are better than nothing. You have often said you would make any sacrifice for me, Mowbray, and you have kept your word—you have sacrificed your dinner. What greater proof of devotion can an Englishman give?"

"I didn't sacrifice much," Captain Mowbray admitted, candidly. "The chops at the town inn are marvels of toughness. I am so glad to see you again, old fellow. You are looking better than you used to do."

"I cannot return the compliment," Douglas said, looking up from his culinary occupation. "You are looking more than four years older than when I last saw you."

"I have drunk many more bottles of wine, have incurred four times the number of debts, and have fallen in and out of love so often—of course it all tells on a man."

"Which is the worst phase of suffering,

the debts or the love-affairs?" Douglas asked, smiling.

"Oh, the debts. Women forget, but creditors never do. Women are forgotten; but how can you obliterate from your mind the daily necessity of obtaining more things on credit? I really think I shall have to exchange into the Line." And Captain Mowbray looked as M. Curtius may have looked as he surveyed the unfathomable horror of the Forum gulf.

"Dinner is served," Douglas announced, gravely, as he placed a steaming, savoury mess of eggs and herbs on the deal table.

Daintiness was not amongst Captain Mowbray's faults. He ate heartily of the dish, and then looked gratefully at his host.

"You always were a clever fellow, by Jove!" he said, with profound admiration. "And this wine has a wondrously delicate flavour. Where did you get it from?"

"From Maçon."

"Oh! I remember—the place where the

women wear those rummy hats. I have been abroad since I saw you, Douglas. I followed your advice, and went first to Paris."

"And did Paris have a consolatory effect?"

"Well, I certainly felt much better after I had been there a fortnight. As Madlle. C—— said, 'Life is too short for regret, and too long for constancy.' Not but what I would have followed that woman (Lady Di. I mean) to the antipodes, if she had beckoned to me with her little finger."

"But she did not beckon?"

"No! she went to Italy, and joined the Ormes' party. I believe her intention was to become Lady Orme; but Orme is so obtuse he didn't see it. I don't suppose he would ever have understood her drift unless she had asked him point-blank to marry, and then he'd have said, 'I'll think about it.' There is no victim so difficult to capture as the one who vacillates. She would

have missed the mark there from the unsteadiness of the object aimed at."

"And where is she now?"

"Back in England. I have only seen her once since her return."

"And then?"

"Then she looked at me with such a sweet, unconscious expression, that she all but deluded me into the belief that there had never been anything between us worth remembering. Clairveaux was in attendance; and although I had fancied I had entirely ceased to care for her, I was sufficiently irritated by her conduct to plunge into an ostentatious flirtation with Amelia Orme."

"And what said Lady Diana?"

"She merely smiled to herself. I think she guessed my motives," Thurstan said, gloomily.

"‘She did show favour to the youth in your sight only to exasperate you,’" quoted Douglas.

"Yes; I suppose she did it to get a rise out of me," Captain Mowbray observed, innocent of the quotation. "But this was nearly two years ago. I should know better how to act indifference now. I have consorted more with all classes of women, and have learnt some of their tricks."

"Your experience does not seem to have increased your respect for the sex," Douglas remarked, drily.

"Why should it?" the young man said, indifferently. "Virtue is as obsolete as peg-top trousers; innocence is out of fashion, and for my part I have no wish to see it revive. It makes life much easier for us, matters being as they are."

"Life might be easier, especially in hot weather, if we all followed the primitive customs of our forefathers, and went about wearing no other sacrifice to decency than a suit of blue woad." Douglas answered impatiently, "I wish you wouldn't talk in this sort of way about women, Mowbray; I

assure you it is not at all in good taste. A man should never speak ill of his country, nor disparage the women of his race; both are much as he makes them."

"Why, you used to be more severe against the sex than any one," his friend said, surprised. "One would think you were in love."

It has been said that Captain Mowbray was shrewd.

"Hush!" Douglas cried, sharply. "Do not talk of love and me together. What has an age embittered by the memories of youth, a wrinkled face, and an uncouth form, to do with the morning-bloom of youth? I am too tired—too sore with long wretchedness—to wrestle with the cruel strength of the passion of love. Its heavenly exultation, its hellish despair, would destroy me. My life has been for years one long waste; but it, at least, has been calm. If I felt my heart's repose troubled, it would be well for me to die."

He spoke with what appeared to be undue energy; his large eyes flashed light from their cavernous recesses, and his lips quivered like those of one who is hurt and dreads to show his pain. Captain Mowbray looked at him with as much wonder as a well-bred man permits himself to feel.

"I do not see why you need talk of wrinkles and uncouthness," he said, presently. "You looked like a head of Jupiter Tonans just now when you were excited. There are no end of women who would like you a thousand times better than me."

Douglas shook his head impatiently.

"What has become of Clairveaux?" he asked, by way of changing the conversation.

"Oh! Clairveaux has placed his hand, a considerable portion of his fortune, and all his volition in the care of a wife. Lady Clairveaux is not strictly pretty, but she

is ‘svelte.’ She has a French woman’s art of making the best of herself and her opportunities. Clairveaux believes her to be a Susanna while she boasts herself a Bathsheba.”

“ And De Smith ?”

“ De Smith is Lady Clairveaux’s favoured admirer and Clairveaux’s most intimate friend. But what a memory you have, Douglas. Fancy your recollecting all these fellows.”

“ It is one of my misfortunes,” Douglas said, “ that I can never forget anything. Memories are sorrow’s fetters : they hold down our pain round us with cruel tenacity long after the wounds have been dealt. I fancy some of us would be happier if we might take nightly draughts from the Lethean river.”

“ I don’t know where that river may be. I’d go and ‘ liquor up ’ there like a shot if I thought it would help me to forget the total of my tailor’s bill,” Captain Mowbray

said simply. "Oh, Douglas! you can't think how it *bore*s one to be poor."

" You mean how it bores one to seem *not* to be poor: you young fellows expend so much more on pretension than you do on pleasure. If you did not lavish your money in doing what is called the 'right thing' you would have more to spend in real luxury."

" What is your idea of real luxury?"

" You do not think I am likely to be a good judge of what the word means," Douglas said, observing his friend's eyes glancing round the barely-furnished room; " but be sure that no lover of fruit has ever appreciated its beauty as Tantalus did. Twenty years ago I revelled in what I called luxury. I sought for and found the most lovely aspects of Nature. I witnessed and in some cases possessed some of man's most perfect handicraft. I had rare paintings on my walls—Magdalens by Guido, with mellow faces that looked as if they

were dropping to sleep in the sunset, oppressed by the wealth of their own warm tresses. I had Cupids, by Rubens, tumbling their fair limbs in deep gorgeous-coloured piles of fruit. I delighted in those dear little sensitive, sensual faces by Greuze ; and I mortgaged my future heritage for the sake of a deep-toned Murillo. I specify these to show you that I revel in colour, and that my eyes do not for choice rest on these bare white walls, which are never adorned by aught gay and brilliant, excepting when a butterfly takes it into its wanton head to perch there for an instant furling and unfurling its velvety wings in the warmth of a stray sunbeam. I won't bore you by dilating on my appreciation of form ; but the refined artist who moulds beauty in marble, carving from the uncouth mass dimpling feet that seem to move through the air as lightly as down—who creates mutable beauty with an immutable substance—who carves tremulous smiles

round ever-still lips, and produces from the hueless stone, limbs which stir the heart to a quicker pulse with their voluptuous representation of perfect human loveliness—he (were he a modern Phidias) could not estimate grace of outline more highly than myself. When I was a lad of eighteen most of my leisure time was spent in my father's library—a room full of grave shadows and formal sombre-coloured furniture. In a niche by the window stood the one grace to the room—an exquisite copy in marble of the Florentine Venus Anadyomene. I cannot describe to you the subtle emotion which the contemplation of this crouching lovely creature awoke in me. Her virginal face haunted me in my dreams. I imaged the shell on which she rested floating in tideless seas. I pictured her with her perfect limbs rosied by the moving veil of cool waters, her filleted head gleaming like a sparkling star in the blue depths. I would fain

have fallen down and kissed the little round feet into the one charm they wanted—that of living blushing loveliness. I caressed with reverent fingers the arms modestly crossed on her breast. Her curved wrist, her dimpled, undulating shoulders, her pear-shaped bosom, half concealed by the shrinking posture, inspired me even then with an appreciation, which was almost rapturous in its intensity, of beauty in its highest form. Judge then, Mowbray, whether my taste is gratified by the sight of hideous, crook-backed old women who stumble through these lanes on Sunday on their way to seek their afternoon doze in church, or by the contemplation of their younger descendants—girls whose limbs are enlarged by labour, whose aspects are harsh from continual toil, whose faces are rough as those of men, and whose hair is coarse as that of horses."

Captain Mowbray thought of the girl he had left trembling amidst the ferns two

mornings ago, and mentally decided that his friend was unfortunate in his rural experiences.

“According to your own definition your present mode of life is joyless and utterly unattractive to your senses. How is it that you seem content?” he asked, stifling a yawn with an inhalation of cigarette smoke.

“Pain is sharper than pleasure is sweet,” the elder man said pithily. “I am content to resign the manifold satisfactions of wealth that I may escape an attendant bitterness which would more than neutralize their enjoyment. I have at least known one great luxury during these latter years of poverty and solitude which I lacked in the old days when I was in, and of, the world.”

“And that is——?”

“The companionship of a pure and sinless life.”

“A woman,” Captain Mowbray muttered to himself. “I thought as much.” Aloud

he said, "Who keeps the old house at Auriel?"

Douglas did not answer for a moment; then he spoke hesitatingly. "An old man called Moore, who was, I believe, placed there by your father."

"Oh! is there no one else?"

"Yes, an equally old woman—a cottager, who, as the Essex people say, 'does for him.'"

Captain Mowbray looked disappointed. "I wonder if there is any game there," he said; "because I might run down for a few days in the shooting season. I am ashamed of myself for knowing so little about the old place. I haven't visited it since I was a boy."

"There isn't a head of game on the place," Douglas replied hastily.

"Well, good-night, dear old fellow!" Thurstan said, rising and buttoning up his great-coat. "I have no end of things to talk to you about; but I haven't time now,

as I must get back to the men. I hope to see you again later in the year, for Airdale, the Master of hounds, has asked me to come and meet the Ormes at his place (only ten miles from you), and to bring down my horses for a week's hunting. We will go over Auriel together some day then. I dare say you already know more about the books and pictures than I do. Good-bye."

"I will walk with you to the railway," Douglas said; and the two went together to S—.

As they shook hands at the station Douglas gave his friend a parting counsel.

"This is an awfully bad country for hunting. It is thickly enclosed with new-made fences; the banks are sharp as knives, and not nearly so firm; what grass there is is cut up by mordykes. I cannot imagine any one who is accustomed to a flying country coming for this creep and crawl—this pitch and toss style of thing."

"What a fellow that is," Thurstan said to himself as the train moved out of the station. "Here I have known him all these years, and never found out before that he had an inkling of what the word hunting meant. I suspect his is an odd history. I wonder if he will ever enlighten me as to who he is or was. Not that it matters. His saving my life is quite antecedent enough for me. The country looks all he says. I shall bring down Blackberry and Bramble to Airdale's. They are quite clever enough. What a pretty girl that was! I feel quite sorry to think that by to-morrow night I shall have left her sixty miles behind me. I dare say Amelia Orme will be very glad to see me. And, after all, women are very much alike; only that girl in the hedgerow didn't wear a lump of false hair, and the colour didn't come off her cheek when I kissed her; on the contrary, it grew redder. In these respects she is decidedly dissimilar to other women."

## CHAPTER X.

## SPIDERS AND FLIES.

THE time was evening, the place the Misses Orme's dressing-room at Orme Castle. It was the night of the ball, and all the preparations for the forthcoming entertainment were completed, with the exception of Rosa's and Amelia's toilettes. At this moment Rosa was in the grub stage —her hair twisted tight in an ungainly bundle at the top of her head, and her face buried in the folds of a soft towel; for, "On nights like these," as Amelia said solemnly, "friction must not be applied to noses prone

to shine." Amelia was developed into the butterfly: her hair was frizzed in golden profusion over her forehead; fresh shining draperies flowed about her. Her ornaments were pearls; her lips were red and her shoulders white. Altogether she was a charming picture of studied innocence.

"*I'm* done," she announced triumphantly. Then in a solemn tone she said, "How do I look?"

"I'll see directly," came in a stifled voice from behind the towel; and in the interim Amelia advanced and receded before the mirror with a look of affectionate admiration at the image reflected there.

"Come into the light," Rosa said, when the face-drying was completed.

Amelia obeyed meekly.

"Um, pretty well; but a little *too much pig* with one ear, you know;" with a significant glance at one rosy cheek.

It was a point of honour that the sisters

should speak the truth to each other on these occasions, however unpleasant it might be to hear or to utter.

Amelia looked at herself again. "You're quite right," she said in a tone of deep conviction. "I shall put a little more on the left side."

"'Two wrongs make a right,' as the horse-coper said when he put a bean in his horse's sound foot," quoted Rosa, pertly.

"Where did you pick up that stable slang?" Miss Orme said disdainfully.

"From papa. But do go away, Amelia; you are taking up all the glass; and I shall never be ready in time."

"People always think so if they see other people dressed first," Miss Orme observed phlegmatically.

"I shall go and see if Lady Diana is ready. She has had a box down from town; but," she added, with emphasis, "one comfort is, do what she can, she can't make herself look eighteen"

"Come back," called Rosa, "before I go down, and tell me if there is too much powder on my nose. Candlelight cannot be trusted."

Amelia promised assent, but she did not keep faith, for on reaching the one sitting-room which had been left comfortable in the general exodus of furniture she found Captain Mowbray seated in an easy-chair, deep in the perusal of Ruff's "Spring Guide to the Turf."

"I called to see your father about a horse," he explained, in answer to Miss Orme's pleased look of surprise. "He asked me to dine with him in his library, and to send into Brighton for my dress clothes. I hope I shall not be in your way here."

"Oh, no!" Amelia said. Then she wondered what o'clock it might be, and where papa was; and, in fact, indulged in all the little meaningless speeches and movements which are apt to characterize the manner

of a very young lady when in the society of the man she prefers.

Meanwhile Lady Diana Merton, who was a visitor at the house, and who had managed to locate herself in the most comfortable suite of rooms it possessed, was seated in an upper chamber, looking out of her window, which commanded a fine view of the sun-flushed down and the quivering ridge of far-off sea.

Make herself eighteen she certainly could not. Almost the only triumph beauty cannot accomplish is the reversal of Time's hour-glass. But who that looked on Lady Di. now would have wished that the golden sands had marked an hour less in her life? The mellow flush of a peach in that warmest, ripest moment ere it drops to earth—the rich fragrance of a gardenia blossom as it expands in the heat of noon—the last ten minutes of a fast run to hounds (but this simile is not poetical)—to aught else that is emblematical of per-

fection her mature loveliness might aptly be likened. Her skin was as fair; her tresses as luxuriant as ever; her lovely gray eyes were not a whit less full of sweet content than when they first gazed with lazy satisfaction on the enchainment of Thurstan Mowbray. With a figure even more luxuriously beautiful than heretofore; with lips yet red and full, and chin still round and dimpled, you will not be surprised to hear that Lady Diana was as charming, as malific, and as unprincipled as she had ever been. She was not a woman to resign her unholy power of charming until the power itself failed her. Then she would have wit enough to discern her failure and retire from the arena where she was not strong enough to conquer. She thought it a great pity that she should ever grow old. She deplored the inevitable necessity, but she meant to bow her head gracefully to the blight of Time; and so soon as she found that men

ceased to love and women to hate her it was her intention to become devout and build a church, if possible; or if that was too expensive, at least put up a memorial window in one. Meantime there was no need yet to design the plan of the place of worship nor choose the subjects for the stained glass, so she ate, drank, and was as merry as it was in her shallow, yet unquiet, fervid nature to be. She was not yet in full dress, for she liked to be perfectly comfortable as long as possible. So she sat enwrapped in the folds of a grey-tinted Cashmere dressing-gown, sipping a cup of tea and turning over the leaves of a novel until such time as the sound of carriage wheels should warn her of approaching guests. Novels did not amuse her very much she thought, as she put down this one gently and took to stroking her spaniel's ears; she could recal infinitely more romantic incidents in her own career than those ordinarily recorded in fiction.

She had known greater sorrow of heart represented by a few commonplace words than ever was expressed in the most elaborate descriptions of fabled grief. She had caught glimpses of direr tragedies in the dramas of life than any that have darkened the pages of a three-volumed novel—darker and more terrible because the guilt was real and the pain veritable. Of all human passions that of love seemed to her most inadequately delineated in books. That of which she read sounded but as a very feeble echo of what she had herself heard wrung from the pain of living hearts. She whose name had been a joy and a rapture, a wail and a curse of the lips of men—she who had heard it breathed in every imaginable cadence of emotion, from the low murmur of hinted tenderness to the short, quick utterance of wounded passion—she who had seen faces pale and flush at her words, had turned the wise into fools, and had exalted weak natures by the strength of the senti-

ment she was able to inspire—was it any wonder she felt that the ordinary platitudes printed on the subject very insufficiently described a passion which is at once the strength and the weakness, the glory and disgrace of man's mutable nature.

Lady Diana was aroused from her contemplation of the spaniel's glossy head by the sound of two voices outside the window; one was that of Amelia Orme, and Lady Di. at once understood that Miss Orme's companion was not of her own sex.

"So Amelia has a flirtation on hand," mused Lady Di. "I wonder why it is that girls get so full of affectation on these occasions. Why do they giggle when there's nothing to laugh at, and make up a strange voice when their own would answer the purpose equally well?"

Lady Diana arose and leaned out of the window.

"I might as well have a look at him,"

she thought; "if I find I do not admire him very much, I'll respect the laws of hospitality and not disturb Amelia's sport."

"Let me disengage this for you," Captain Mowbray said in a low, tender voice to Miss Orme, referring to a stray blossom of overhanging clematis, which had become entangled in her fluffy braids. The clematis grew directly under Lady Diana's window, and Thurstan was lingering rather longer than was necessary over his task when he accidentally looked up, and saw a woman's head and shoulders—a lovely living picture in a framework of dull-red bricks and rippling ivy leaves.

The sunset flushed the fair face and warmcoloured masses of hair with mellow glory; the soft grey tints of the wrapper folded over her bosom, and the dark crimson rose which nestled behind one ear, completed the perfection of colouring which Titian would have exulted to immortalize.

As Captain Mowbray caught sight of the serene, downcast face, Miss Orme gave an exclamation of pain and anger.

"Really, Captain Mowbray, you hurt me very much. You've torn out quite a big lock," putting her hand to the disarranged braid.

"I beg a thousand pardons. I am so grieved at my stupidity," he murmured in a low voice. Then he looked up at the window and took off his hat. "I am so delighted to see you again, Lady Diana," he said aloud. "If you are not already hampered by engagements, may I hope for the honour of the second valse with you?"

Lady Diana smiled pleasantly.

"I never dance now. It is the nature of young things to frisk about: young kids, young lambs, young kittens, and young girls may do so with propriety, but at my age, one should be a spectator, not a participator in spring-tide gambols."

But in her heart Lady Diana thought

that her old pupil had made considerable progress since their last meeting, when he allowed her, as he said, "To get a rise out of him."

"The second valse indeed!" she muttered as she retreated to her toilette table. "Fancy any one's looking at me and asking me to be second in anything!"

His self-possession annoyed her more than she cared to acknowledge to herself. He was handsomer than ever, she thought—much too handsome for that pasty-faced chit, Amelia.

"Why do young girls always wear white dresses?" she said, looking spitefully at Miss Orme's retreating figure. "These emblems of virginity always develop red elbows so forcibly." Then she sat down to her writing-desk and took out a little volume bound in blue velvet and guarded by a Bramah lock.

"There is still an hour to spare," she thought, "before the company will arrive.

I will add a few axioms to my book of moral reflections.

PART I.—LADY DIANA MERTON'S MORAL  
REFLECTIONS.

Never write compromising letters to a married man. Sooner or later they will fall into the hands of the inevitable wife. Perhaps he leaves them in his coat pocket.

From the time of that domestic *esclandre* in the house of the Captain of King Pharaoh's guard to the present date much mischief has arisen from the shifting of a coat.

In this case, Jane the housemaid is quickly enlightened as to the fact of your being (or signing yourself) "His always;" then the epistle is placed in such a position that "missus" cannot fail to perceive it. English women are devoid of generosity, and delight in what Jane designates as a "regular blow up." A French *femme de chambre*, conceals a stray *billet-doux* as naturally as my tame fox used to hide every

end of candle which fell in the way of his purloining nose.

Perhaps he ties up your packet of devotion with the yellow silk that bound his bundles of cigars.

To the lynx-eyed detective who shares his home, the yellow ribbon (fatal as the yellow garters of the Queen of Babylon) will at once betray the sentiment and the secret.

Perhaps he locks them up in his desk and keeps the keys under his pillow. In this event Bramah locks avail nothing, for most men sleep soundly.

It would be better to avoid lovers with legal encumbrances altogether. It is a pity, too, for there are some charming Benedicks whose only fault is that they *are* Benedicks. Be wary with those whose wives also “Live in Arcadia.” The wife who is (there are no *has beens* in this case, “once a coquette always a coquette,”) a flirt brings all the advantages of finished expe-

rience to assist her in detecting the clumsy manœuvres of her spouse. She has less than ordinary feminine ability if she does not make his vices a lever to exalt her own virtues—if she does not cause him to expiate his want of skill in large sacrifices to her of money and jewellery; and if she does not succeed in obtaining an extension of her own licence to amuse herself “on the premises.” You can never trust to the flirting wife’s being too much occupied by her own designs to observe yours; the dog in the manger was doubtless of the female gender.

Supposing you evade the dangers of correspondence, there are many other perils to be considered with reference to this “twy-natured” class; generally the husband is the person least considered in his household. Will he not some day, when over-oppressed by the inferiority of his position, reassert his dignity at your expense? Will he not drop dark hints of some

one who knows how to appreciate him, and ostentatiously show the new locket at his watch-chain, or simper at the mention of your name? Some poor weak fools there are who do these things *once*, and, like other enslaved races, sink lower after their futile attempts at rebellion.

Then there is the good and conscientious man, whose virtue increases as his feet grow weary of treading the forbidden path. With a burst of moral sentiment, he will suddenly confess all to his wife; together they anathematise the snare and weep over the snared. He adds treachery and cowardice to his former vice, and imagines that the abnegation of the sin he has ceased to desire is an evidence of sincere penitence. This is the most despicable of all the species.

There is the husband who *confides* in his stronger half, and whose wife encourages such confidences (doubtless for her own purpose); of him I have little to say, excepting that he shows wisdom in allying with

himself one who as an enemy would certainly be too powerful for him.

One more counsel on this subject, and I have done : If you have a heart, give it not to a married man, nor in any way make yourself uncomfortable for his sake. Sooner or later he *must* and *will* resign you for his wife. Habit and the law give her an unassailable vantage-ground. The horse that escapes to the pasture, and kicks up his heels many times with exceeding great joy in his fictitious freedom, will return meekly to his stall at the feeding-hour. The tame bird that forces its way through its prison-bars in a wild longing to soar through the dim wet clouds, or nestle under the forest leaves, pines ere night for the comfort of its sheltered home and provided meal. And the married man (whatever he may swear in the delight of a novel wickedness) will always return to the bourne where his easy-chair, his slippers, his daily occupations, the mistress of his house, and the mother of his

children await him. This reflection has a decided moral tendency. Wives, be patient with your husbands. Should he make a slight deviation from the paths of conjugalitv, you will be able, in sporting parlance, to "make a good thing out of it." He will tire of his new love as certainly as he has tired of you ; and you have in your favour nine points of the law.

Trust no woman ; nor men either, if you can help it. I have sometimes wished in my heart that all men were dumb and unable to write their own name—much less mine. They seldom say anything worth remembering. There is a dreadful sameness about their protestations. Their calligraphic efforts are rarely of sufficient importance to art to atone for their terrible carelessness about blotting-paper. Blotting-paper and ladies' maids are the support of the Divorce Court.

Your unmarried men are, as a rule, to be moderately trusted — unless, indeed, they

are prone to habits of intemperance. You must not object to their pulling up their shirt-collars uneasily when you are mentioned, or to their blushing when they meet you, or to their indiscreet and violent defence of you to your spiteful rival. These are the follies of youth, and although they betray the boy's feelings they do not necessarily imply your complicity.

My reflections in this place chiefly concern the bigger and stupider sex. In another part of my note-book will be found a few observations on the wilier half of human-kind.

#### PART II.—GENERAL AXIOMS.

Our greatest misery generally arises from our overrating ourselves. We get dreadful hurts through our vanity, and think it is our hearts that suffer. I appreciate myself (no woman succeeds who does not), but I am rarely blinded by my self-esteem. I know when my nose is red, or

when I am otherwise looking plain. Then I conceal myself from the view of mankind. Some women are less modest, and are consequently less successful.

If you have genius conceal it as you would a grey hair, or hide it, as Brutus did, under the appearance of idiotcy.

Tact is the supremest weapon in the hands of a woman. It is the fine tool that rivets the chains of beauty.

At the first short letter your lover writes you, dismiss him. No man who loves has ever need to excuse a neglect to his mistress.

Let not your lover feel that he has ever made a sacrifice (even of a cigar) to you. Promote his comfort in small matters, partly because it is Christian-like to afford some compensation for the torment you inflict on him, chiefly because his attention should never be distracted from you by little worries.

Never forget that men's vanity is greater than their hearts. They will forgive a

wound to the latter sooner than an insult to the former.

Never love at all where you wish to be loved greatly.

As no one is abused save to a willing listener, the friend who tells you she has heard you calumniated must be ranked with the calumniator.

Listen to nothing your friend wishes to tell you for "your own good" and because it is "her duty;" it will be something unpleasant.

An Englishman will trust his friend with his mistress sooner than with his horse.

No fire is so difficult to rekindle as one where the ashes are already burnt black. But "every man has his price," and can be reached either through his vanity, his intellect, or his passions.

It will be understood that the concluding portion of Lady Diana's MS. was written after the little episode at the window.

When her toilet was completed she looked at herself in the mirror with mingled admiration and regret. The admiration was for herself, the regret for some one unknown. It may be premised that he was of the masculine gender, for her maid heard her murmur something which sounded like “Poor fellow!”

The ball was over. The Duke of Grandacres had not proposed to Amelia, but he had danced once with her, and that, as she said to her sister, “was something towards it.”

Moreover, Thurstan Mowbray had paid no attention whatever to Lady Diana. Amelia, in the confidential hours of dressing-gown and slippers, mentioned this circumstance to her sister with great satisfaction, but Lady Diana herself viewed it in a different light, for on the pages of the volume before mentioned she inscribed the following :—

"He who deliberately avoids you, is lost."

She was annoyed, but not disheartened, by Thurstan's apparent coldness. Well versed in all the mutability of suffering of which the human heart is capable, she knew that as the fish in dying displays a variety of hues (strange beauty born of mortal pain) ere it is overspread by the dull colour of death, so does a lover exhibit curious and incomprehensible developments of feeling before his love perishes in indifference. She had known prouder men than this one assume the most profound innocence of her and her attractions; she had seen them hold aloof from her, guarding jealously, with all the power of their galled spirits, the impulsive tenderness of eye, lip, and hand. She had known others, more subtle in their tactics, pretend to a careless ease of manner the better to conceal the reality of their pain; but sooner or later the attempt to dissimulate with their passion ended in utter

failure, and the slave crouched once more beneath the sweet oppression of bondage more exquisite than freedom.

Lady Diana would compassionate defeat, but she could never resolve to spare where she encountered opposition. She was like the Palestine warrior of old, who "slew plentifully," and then "bewailed courageously" over the heaps of slain.

Besides, she felt something of her old tenderness revive for this handsome boy. True, her tenderness, like an Eastern potentate's, had a touch of the bowstring in it; but hers was a moral strangulation. She would stifle all that was good in a man's heart rather than that it should not beat for her. A husband must leave his wife, a lover his mistress, sooner than defy her influence. Yet there had been cases when she had mourned the ruin she had wrought, and had even tried to lure the delinquents she herself had fashioned back into their moral perpendicular.

Fancy a upas tree apologising for its malign influence, and entreating that its poison should be ejected by the victim !

In her own way Lady Di. had loved Thurstan. She loved him none the less for his defiance of her now, but she swore in her heart that ere long he should be hers, body and soul—a human puppet, which should take the place of the dolls of childhood, and while the tedium of her leisure hours ; a toy which should weep real tears, breathe real breath, and whose heart should beat fast or slow at her bidding, even as the wax effigies had used to wail or smile according as her infant fingers pulled the wire. But even a child has its preferences among dolls, and Lady Diana liked this male specimen with the brown eyes and curly hair better than others.

“ As to Amelia Orme, she must be taken down,” Lady Di. said to herself as she watched this young lady’s little manœuvres to attract Thurstan’s attention.

But coquettes, like other gamblers, are victims laid at the altar of Chance. Lady Di. had calculated on passing several weeks in her quasi lover's society. She had planned every move in her game with a precision worthy of a professional chess-player. She disliked to be hurried in her play. To do her justice, she preferred to retain an aspect of dignity, even of modesty, in these ignoble encounters. Like a child who attempts to give his adversary fool's mate, looking very hard in another direction all the while to divert suspicion, Lady Di. kept an innocent countenance during the progress of her machinations. I think this appearance of lamb-like unconsciousness was one of the most potent snares wherewith this beauty lured prey to her wolfish maw. But for the present, at least, the game was stopped—the pieces overset.

On the morning succeeding the ball at Orme House, Thurstan was sitting in the music-room, turning over a song for one

sister, while he dexterously pressed the hand of another, when the song and the flirtation were brought to a premature close by the entrance of a servant, who brought on a salver a telegraphic message for Captain Mowbray. It announced that his father was very dangerously ill, and it requested his immediate presence at Pisa.

It was as if a funeral train flung its gloomy shadow over a path gay with bridal flowers. A cloud fell over the faces of all. It is dismal to be recalled from laughter, music, and mirth, to the voice of the bell which tolls finis, and the vision of the inevitable white robe, of which the fashion endures for ever, independent of milliners and mourning warehouses. Besides the natural awe which falls on even the most light-hearted at the sound of that ugly word death, those around Captain Mowbray had their own selfish reasons for sorrowing with his sorrow. Amelia Orme was becoming really attached to him, and the idea

of his departure made her feel sore at heart. Lord Orme was disturbed, because Mr. Mowbray had been a cotemporary of his own. “What a sad thing! He was at Eton with me, you know. Older than me, but still we were schoolfellows.”

“That doesn’t make it any sadder, papa, does it?” muttered Rosa, pertly, not seeing that Lord Orme’s regret was as one tree may feel when its coeval falls, bowed down by storms and age.

Lady Di. sitting in a corner in a becoming attitude (becoming attitudes came as naturally to Lady Di. as prinking does to a peacock), with a confusion of coloured wools mixed up with her fingers and knitting-pins, made a vicious fracture of a twisted loop, and said to herself, “Tiresome old man!”

When Thurstan had said good-bye to all he paused before Lady Diana. “If all goes well,” he said, hurriedly, “I shall go to Airdale’s for a week’s hunting early in

the season. The Ormes are going—shall you be there?"

Lady Di. said "Yes," meekly enough. She liked Mr. Airdale, it was a pleasant place to stay at, she should certainly go. She was all meekness, depression, and pathos until Thurstan was gone, and she went upstairs to enjoy the privacy of her own room. Then she glanced at a mirror, and a look of gentle triumph sparkled in her grey eyes.

"I certainly do not show my age," she said.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PERPLEX'D IN THE EXTREME.

*Robert Douglas's Journal.*

Auriel, Nov. 18.

HAVE I not read somewhere of a girl who picked up a linnet from the dust in which it had been thrown with bruised wing and ruffled breast, the victim of a schoolboy's appreciation of human superiority to those pretty little graces of nature which boast not the glory of souls, only of wings? Well, the girl (girls are less brutal than boys—perchance it is the latent beauty of maternity which is revealed in their sheltering instincts) picked up the panting, bright-

eyed morsel of fluff and carried it home. The bird was young, and with the facile inconstancy of youth adapted itself by degrees to its new home. A few square inches of wirework replaced the old dwelling of illimitable space, a rose-leaf edging round the cottage window supplied the countless rustlings of the forest, and the bird, tamed by Time, that great Juggernaut which crushes all burthens smooth, grew to love its captor and whistle to her voice. Then came a time when the girl sickened ; it was the bird's place to lift its friend from the slough. During the girl's illness the bird's cage had been darkened by a cloth, lest its tiny voice should make too much noisy joy in the chamber ; but as soon as the girl's eyes grew conscious they pleaded impatiently that the cloth should be removed, and one happy morning sunshine again flooded the wire prison, and the bird, after making its birdish toilette, burst from moping into rapture, and trilled out a jubilee

of inconsequent melody. Then the girl reaped the reward of her act of salvation. She was crippled and might not leave her weary bed ; she was partially blinded by weakness, and could not face the gladness of the sun ; she was obliged for a long season to turn her face to the wall, and while the hours, otherwise so blank, tided away, her ears were filled with the sweet hints conveyed in the linnet's song. The rush of the free winds, the heavy nodding of the bulrush, the shuddering haste of the stream, the splendour of the films blown across the face of the setting sun, the faint fragrance of ripening blossoms—all these were hymned by the child of air, and the child of earth took comfort in the sound.

What has this to do with Azalea ?—nothing. Only that every memory, every experience, every fancy, floated from the past to be fused in the possibilities of the future ; all the old sorrows, all the dead joys, all the tremulous silence of the pre-

sent, seem stirred by her influence, even as the kiss in the magic bower woke the sleepers of a century into a new, strange world.

I have rescued my bird from a slough of incomprehension. Her mind was filled with dim light, beautiful in hue as that which streams through cathedral panes, but vague, lacking the clearness to show the severe perfection of truth. Mine has been the breath to blow away this haze of the morning; I it is who have strengthened her intellect into the rich fulness of noontide power. I have enabled my bird to look at the sun, and when the hour comes when I shall be blind, perchance, with the terrible dimness of fatuity, will she sing of the day, will she hint brightness to me and comfort despair? I doubt. It was a bird who did this charity: human faith scarce ranks so high.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is no unkindness in silence (and

my life has been silent for years past); a great burthen, a great weariness perhaps, but no acute injury; but there is a whisper of trouble now sounding in the air, a throb of human pain beating in my heart. For a long while I heard nothing in Nature but its own harmonious voice—a voice which soothed like a loving cool hand laid on a burning forehead. There was no taunt in the bird's trill, no reproach in the wind, no want of faith in the sun and moon. We do not have mad dreams about these things, so we cannot be deluded by them into false heights of exultation, and fall therefrom in an agony of grovelling disappointment. Shall I tear it from me at once, this threatening evil? shall I crush it out as I would a creeping red flame of fire? shall I turn my face from it and fly? And what does this question prove? I try and hide my thoughts from myself, but they leap up in strength as the flame once allowed to have birth flares up its threatenings of destruc-

tion. Oh ! child, child, how your calm face troubles mine ; how your unconscious serenity irritates the fever in my mind ! If I were to leave you to-morrow and begin all the old sick life of aimless wanderings, carrying with me the great blank of your absence, how would you feel ? A little sorry, perhaps, for I have been kind to Moore, and his dim eyes brighten at my approach, and his hand trembles with nervous satisfaction as it gropes in search of mine. She might even miss me for her own sake. Am I not her only companion in intellect, yet do not the young prize beauty more highly than genius ? She would weep far bitterer tears if her pet birds were to droop into death, or her favourite dog get a mortal injury, than at my departure. She loves these creatures, loves them with the warm, unreasoning sympathy with which Nature sometimes links tender human hearts to her dumb offspring. Azalea has taught the wood-

dove to coo in her breast ; her dog creeps to her for comfort if it receives a sudden hurt ; her eyes close into a sidelong glance of ineffable tenderness when her grey-headed jackdaw perches on her hand, chuckling quaint choked notes. But I, I am less to her even than these, infinitely less to her than the vague glories of her untried future. She has grown to the age of dreams ; she is no longer the child whose pleasure is in gambol and unrest ; she now rejoices in solitude ; she likes to commune with the beauty of her own hopes, and in these I have no place—am no more associated with them than is the dull level road which we have traversed all our lives with the sun-glowed peaks of unattainable hills. I will go and see her ; the sight of her unconscious face may restore my failing control. How shall I be vexed because a beautiful flower smiles at the sun rather than at me, or a child whom I have known long fail to feel for me the surprise of passion ?

Passion ! Such a word is a profanation to her pure face ; such a word is inadmissible in describing the relations between a young and beautiful woman and an old, uncomely man. Such passion she might feel for me as the wind shows when it blows all the dead leaves from wintry boughs in one soft, sapless hecatomb of decay.

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I have just returned from Auriel. Keeping jealous and scrupulous watch over myself, I displayed nought but a somewhat unusual constraint—at least in a younger and more graceful man it would have been constraint, but with me I fear it was ungainly sternness ; but it did not matter. She did not heed, far less inquire, even in her eyes, of the cause of my disquiet. She ran down the path to meet me, babbling gaily as a wayward brook. “There was news—great news !” she said, clasping my arm. “I must try and guess what it was.” I suggested that old Sally’s grandson had

"come home from the Indies," a possible advent which was ever associated in the old woman's mind with a paradise of comfort—an hour when all the pinch of poverty was to relax. Guess again. Well, had the cat brought into the world of birds and mice some small snowy duplicates of herself—creatures with querulous mews, which to Azalea's ear would plead for immunity from the death of the rain-butt? Wrong again! I said I would guess no more. I spoke harshly, to conceal a mighty tremor of delight which thrilled me when her hands clasped mine caressingly; a delight which died almost as soon as it was born, for she flitted away from me again and caught hold of a pale cluster of chrysanthemums.

Then with her face sparkling, and breath coming quick, she cried—

"I have seen some people!"

What description of people?—a gang of labourers trooping to work?—some

red-cheeked, bare-armed children, amusing themselves in that playground of the poor, the roadside and the hedgerow ? I did not imagine that any but ordinary objects had excited her attention, and I was unprepared for her answer.

“ I have seen horses and dogs, and men in red coats, and ladies—two ladies I think I saw—and they flew like the wind : and —oh ! look ! they are here again ! ”

She grasped my arm, her face glowing with excitement, her lips apart, her other hand pointing to a distant line of meadows which skirt the south side of the shrubberies. We were in the shrubbery-path, and in front of us a tree had fallen and let in a wide gap of light in the dense line of shadow.

She perched her pretty arched feet on the gnarled side of the branch near her, and stood like a beautiful wild bird, which, with bright startled eyes and head upraised, listens for a possible foe in the rustle of a

leaf—only that the child's face was scarcely one of apprehension ; there was something of hope in its vivid expression. Hope of what ? I cannot say ; nor can I tell why it is, a shadow fell on my own face as I saw the light in hers.

Far off beyond the meadow, the blue haze of distance was flecked by scarlet coats.

Only two men were far in advance of the rest. These two were in close company with the pack, which streamed down the slope of the meadow towards us.

On they came, close and compact. They were silent, but there was eloquence in their motion. The scent held them as though it were a magnet to their desiring breath ; their sterns, no longer quivered by doubt or anxiety, were close down. The scent was burning, and the pace too fast to allow of any superfluous expression of excitement. Not a hound spoke ; they swept on a bright, moving flash of lust. Every

faculty in them was strained to the utmost. They were tired, but they hung on to the line as though glued to it. Certainty added fury to their effort. The wind, which blew in the track of their flying prey, brought delight to their nostrils and lifted them onwards in an accession of fierce exultation. It might be a comedy to the pink-coated sportsman behind, or even to that thoroughbred steeple-chaser—an animal that still took his fences with the nonchalance of a gentleman, in spite of the heavy plough up which he had been obliged to gallop ; but to the hounds it was a very serious drama indeed—one which necessitated their closest attention, and which absorbed all lesser and illicit attractions : the youngest and last-entered hound among them would not have dared to have even turned the white of his eye towards a hare, though she had got up under his paws ; while as to the panting, wet bundle of fur which crept into the water-ditch close to where Azalea and I

stood, there could be no doubt but that he was suffering a dire tragedy.

"They will kill him!" gasped Azalea.  
"Don't let them, Robert!"

The hunted creature glanced sideways at us, with an expression which seemed to say, "There's another devil!" Then he paused as though to consider his last resource. He was pretty nearly exhausted. Doubtless it is fatiguing to run an hour and forty minutes (I learnt afterwards they had been running that time), best foot foremost, at pain of death; it did him great credit that he was still able to form any plan of evasion. To the right of us was Azalea's little summer-house, a building in which she was wont to hold levées of woodpigeons—grey-headed courtiers who mopped and mowed before her in their search for grain. The door of this hut stood ajar, and the fox saw before him this last chance for existence. In an instant, with a desperate effort, he cleared the space between the ditch and the

hut and disappeared in the shadow of the interior ; and when Azalea peeped in after him, previous to securing the door of his retreat, she saw a tuft of grey fur, fringing a log near the thatched roof.

“ He has tucked himself in, all but his tail ! ” she said with glee. “ They shan’t have him ; shall they, Robert ? ”

I shook my head. “ You are dreadfully unsophisticated, Azalea ; no wonder Moore complains of your living without the pale of the world. If you were a fashionable young lady, you would perhaps know how to give a *view halloo*, or lift the hounds on to the line of that fox, which you have just secreted in that unsportswoman-like fashion ; you would clap your hands with delight at the shriek of a hare run into by a swift greyhound ; at the very least, you would sometimes spend the summer hours in watching showers of pigeons fall under the prowess of the Red House champions ; you might make a book on the event, while

your kid gloves got splashed with the warm blood of the living targets."

A look of disgust deepened in the girl's eyes.

"They are beasts," she said, emphatically. "I wish that such women went to the Cannibal Islands, and heard the sporting members of the tribes taking and giving odds as to which would be the first eaten."

"When did you hear such an expression?" I asked, in amused wonder.

She looked ashamed, and muttered something about Conrad's having betted that he would eat six jam tarts in two minutes; but broke off to cry out, "Here they are!"

The pack were close to us; in a minute they were in and out the ditch, and round our feet. The majority rushed on; but a few old hounds threw up their heads and declined to be deluded. The two horsemen I have mentioned as being forward galloped up to the fence, followed by one or two others. "Where? where? Have you

seen him? Where did he go?" they shouted.

Azalea pinched my arm. I hesitated. The old hounds were still at fault; for when the fox sprung from the water-ditch to the hut, he had done so with a single bound which cleared the short yard of ground which lay between the verge of the ditch and the hut-door.

" You have seen him ?" one of the horse-men cried, interrogating Azalea.

Her cheek flushed and her lips quivered. Then she stood forward in the sunshine, this incarnation of beauty and guilelessness, and deliberately lied.

" I saw him," she said, " distinctly go up there," pointing vaguely towards a distant field. Then she turned on me with a savage whisper—

" If you contradict me, I'll never learn another line of Homer."

As the huntsman called off the puzzled hounds, and the riders turned their tired

horses away from the fence, I looked reproachfully at her conscious face.

“It is never good to lie.”

“Yes it is,” she answered, defiantly.  
“Sometimes it is quite right.”

“Such as when?”

She hesitated. “When—when the—the women said, in Pharaoh’s time, you know, that all the little boys were little girls. Didn’t they do right?”

“But foxes are not infants.”

“Everything which is defenceless should be as an infant to us,” she said, gravely.  
“But look there! What is he going to do?”

He, was the man on the thoroughbred horse, whom I had noticed when I first saw the hounds; a fine-looking young man, whose air and manner seemed familiar to me even in the distance, but whom I did not recognise until he now came quite up to the fence.

“What’s on the other side?” he called out.

“Water. It’s a double. Look out!”

He took back his horse a few yards, and trotted slowly down to the fence.

Then came a flash of crimson through the golden autumn haze before us. I looked at Azalea. Was it my fancy—was it the surprise of the to her novel sight? or did she blush and wear an expression which was almost one of consciousness, as Thurstan Mowbray, handsome and bright as ever (damn him!), advanced towards me, taking off his hat to her.

“So glad to see you again, old fellow,” he said, his big brown eyes seeming to catch new fire as he glanced at my companion. “You see, I have come to try the hunting-grounds of my native country. Will you do me the honour to——?”

I forced myself to anticipate his request, although I fear I performed the ceremony of introducing Captain Mowbray to Miss Moore in a very churlish fashion : introduce the falcon to the dove, the deer-hound to

the doe—introduce youth, beauty, and experience to youth, beauty, and ignorance—introduce this young and handsome man, blessed with every adventitious grace, to the girl who is worshipped by me, who am old, ungainly, unattractive, my intellect too large for her to grasp. Of what use is limitless space to a bird which has only learned to fly a few yards? I have spoken it now to myself—I have owned to myself the degradation of a captivity which I have attempted to ignore in my pride; but now comes the gall which forces out this cry of humiliation. I love her with all the madness of a boy, with all the anguish of a man. Child! when I saw you there in the evening sun, all the glows of autumn seeming to deepen on your golden head, your eyes shy and averted, your face troubled with something which, if it was not pleasure, was one of its echoes; and that handsome man, whom Nature seemed to link with you, so well did his appearance match yours, talking eagerly

to you, alluding to me occasionally, but evidently engrossed by the loveliness of your image—when I saw all this, there came a terrible sickening over my heart. Then I looked at that man with some such dark foreboding of prescient guilt as may have clouded Cain's heart when bitter jealousy begot lust of blood.

When Mowbray, smiling, bade us adieu, he added—

"I will ride over to-morrow, and you must tell me all about the pictures." He spoke to me, but he looked at Azalea.

## CHAPTER XII.

### LOVE PASSED AN HOUR OF LOVE WITH ME.

So she had seen it once more—that bright, audacious face which had caused such tumult in her existence on that never-to-be-forgotten day when she stood on the bank in a tremble of ferns. Was she angered still when she remembered the insult of that surprise ? Certainly it was anger which flushed her cheek and made her pulses throb when she saw him again ; but then his manner was so different now, he was so courteous and gentle ; she could hardly realise that this was the person she had wished to slay

with some imaginary dagger. And he was owner of Auriel, too, or would be so one day ; Robert Douglas told her thus much in answer to her questions.

The grim warriors on the wall acquired an additional interest in her eyes now that she had seen their living representative. When she next went down stairs she paused to wonder whether this Mowbray inherited any of the noble daring which made Gaston de Mowbray throw himself before the body of his young brother, a living shield, which presently fell hacked with wounds, while the boy rode away unscathed. The legend ran that, when the lad returned home, he was met at the gates by three women—his and Gaston's mother, Gaston's wife, and his own betrothed. One and all cursed him for the sake of the dead, whereupon he slew himself at their feet, proving, in the quaint words of the chronicler, that “three angry women were more terrible than all the fierceness of war.” Azalea looked long and

earnestly at the portrait of the hero, and unconsciously began to identify, in some measure, the living Mowbray with his dead ancestor. She could scarcely have explained why it was she accepted him as a type of the gallant elder brother rather than of the younger one. Perhaps it was from the beautiful facility with which youth ever believes in the nobler part ; it is only age and experience that image baseness. Azalea, living in an ideal world, could not suspect how ignoble were the aims, how mean and trifling the ambition of the majority of nineteenth-century heroes, who wear gold lace and spurs.

After looking at the portrait which seemed to her to embody the lineaments of the gay rider on horseback who had flashed towards her through the grey woods yesterday, Azalea walked softly into the large salon, and looked at her own reflection in a large old-fashioned mirror.

This is what Robert Douglas saw when,

a few moments later, his tall form and moody face darkened the doorway.

The bright glow of her cheeks and hair showed dimly through the dust and cob-webs which obscured the mirror ; a crack marred the dimple in her chin, a tremulous thread, blotched by a spider, seemed to wave down her hair ; her hands were busy securing a rose over one little ear, a fillet of ribbon glistened behind the other. The rose secured (Douglas mechanically noted a broken stem protruding outside the casement from which the flower had been riven, and which bore an injured and truculent aspect, as if lamenting the decapitation), Azalea stepped back, on her toes, with such a look of meditation as a bird wears when it puzzles over its duplicate in a mirror.

She was asking herself for the first time,  
“Am I fair?”

And Douglas, watching her from the door, felt his head contract with pain as he saw the nascent symptom of coquetry, the first

consciousness of physical beauty develop itself in one who had hitherto been as careless of her loveliness as the birds of the air.

Azalea, humming a little song, pulling the ribbon, and readjusting the blossom, occupied by awakening instincts of her innocent vanity, did not see the harsh look bent upon her.

Presently the glow died away on her face, the ribbon and the flower were plucked from her hold, and Robert Douglas stood near to her, his eyes flashing as they had never done since that hot summer noon when she displeased him in the garden.

“Why are you decking yourself in this way?” he asked, savagely. “Is it to please Moore? He is nearly blind, you know. He could scarcely distinguish that rose from a clot of blood: he might think you had been wounded. Is it for me?—no, I know that it is not. You do not care that I should admire you, do you, Azalea?”

“I don’t know,” she stammered, half

frightened. "I never thought; I was only wondering."

"Wondering if you are fair? Be easy on that point; you are fair enough to lead a man to the devil; fair enough to induce others to lead you there. I have sometimes wished for your sake, Azalea, that you were ill-favoured as the women who are burnt red in autumn suns, and coarsened by labour. But I comforted myself, thinking there was safety even for beauty in solitude, and now——." He checked himself, remembering that to warn a child or a woman of danger is to expose them to it. He added more gently—

"Forgive me for speaking so roughly, Azalea; but if you only knew how I should loathe to see your guileless face spoilt by consciousness of its attraction. Be content with the beauty God has given you. Keep that spontaneous charm of movement which seems to make you one with the wind, the sun, and the flowers. You need no petty

trickeries to enhance your natural grace ; artificial allurements belong to false hearts."

"I meant no harm," the girl faltered, looking down ; but when Douglas left her to make his morning greeting to old Moore, she furtively replaced the blossom and the ribbon in her hair, and looked once more at her own reflection, with her face radiant with a new light.

"I am pretty," she whispered to herself, and her lips curled into a smile as she spoke. "For all his scolding he thinks me fair—he owned as much."

Then she went and sat at the window, and looked wistfully at the avenue path, which seemed to tremble in the light and shadow which played over it, which proves that Douglas had been wiser had he held his peace.

*Robert Douglas's Journal continued.*

"There are two hells made by man for himself—remorse and jealousy. Which is

the most terrible of endurance, the hell of the past or the hell of the present? In which is the flame hottest? Remorse is the dull, low throb of unassuageable pain, jealousy the wild bound of a fever which is almost craze.

“What have I done to deserve this last? Is it not enough punishment that I have wandered through all the prime of my life with my head down; that for me no bird is jubilant, no sun is bright, no voice is glad?

\* \* \* \* \*

“For years I have carried a pall. What devil possessed me that I should break from its shadow to clutch at roses? That man whose life I saved, need he have cast the shadow of his beauty over the one gleam of sunshine in my path? ‘He would come again!’ Of course he came. Is not the one rare flower which grows in a wilderness more attractive than a thousand exotics massed together under a few yards of glass? He was seized with an immense interest in

the old portraits and books. Will Miss Moore tell him 'all about them?' She begins shy and flushing at the sound of her own voice, not looking at him, but pulling the rose at her breast to fragments. Then the fire of her enthusiasm outblazes the cool shadow of reserve. She tells him of heroic actions done by his ancestors; how such a one died for his friend; how they fought and loved; how they vanquished and suffered. Then her face brightens and her tones grow earnest. The mind soars above physical trammels. She is no longer a little girl half shy half antagonistic before this handsome stranger. She speaks with her soul in her eyes, and looks at him with the pure, unconscious regard of an angel. Meanwhile the young man yawns a good deal, but takes every available opportunity of drawing nearer to her, of touching her hand, of caressing, when her face is averted, stray curls blown about her head by the wind.

“It is a fortnight since that day when this fresh curse in my life fell on me—this hideous jealousy which shows me how hopeless, how puerile, and how indelible is my love. Perhaps the bitterest pang of all is to feel that were I free, were I unshackled by earthly bonds, and were my soul clean, so that I could place myself at her feet, she would walk away, never perceiving that I was thus prostrate. I never could be to her even a possibility. I rank with her old guardian, with the gloomy shadows of the house, with all the familiar scenes of childhood : I am an appendage. This Mowbray is in himself a new event, an event which colours all her hitherto hueless existence.

“The ribbon and the rose which I discarded have not again reappeared, but in her eyes is a light, in her cheeks a blush, when *he* enters the place which I can scarcely pluck away, but which go near to drive me mad. A fortnight to-day since he crossed my path, and he has been here

nearly every day since. Heaven help me! My hate of him is becoming hideous. This mean, bitter jealousy dwarfs the big heart into that of a fretting child. I loathe and scorn myself for the ignoble torture self-inflicted; I am hurt by a wound which is ever sore, girded by a snare from which no ingenuity can free me; I seek to evade its pressure; I withdraw from her society, and strive to find forgetfulness in the records of centuries when she was not, of languages in which her voice had no sound. Then I wonder why they are so colourless, so dumb in my imagination. Time was when the tenants of antiquity lived for me, now before this girl's gracious-breathing spirit they fade into spectres. Sitting alone in my attic at night, I purpose hours of earnest mental occupation. I pore over crabbed pages, hold my head between my hands, and try not to catch the reflection of that withered, harsh face peering at me from the cracked mirror opposite, and then her pre-

sence approaches in that gust of lonely-sounding wind tossing the bough against the pane; her face gleams in that star which sparkles in the upper square of the casement. She pervades the whole chamber, and my thoughts fall into confusion again. Formerly the vision of her was a balm to the present, a consolation to the past, now she brings torture with her image. I would drive away her face, and it is seared on my heart. I sleep, and her voice speaks through the silent awe of night. The face I see thus never looks towards me, the voice never breathes my name. Her indifference to me amounts now to forgetfulness. A new interest possesses her. She herself is ignorant of its nature, but I, I am crushed by the misery of my prescience."

\* \* \* \* \*

The hours "drawled" (that was George Moore's term for the dreamy, drowsy autumn noons) into days, and days slipped into weeks, and still Captain Mowbray lingered.

in the vicinity of Auriel, showing an increasing interest in what he vaguely described as "the books and pictures and all that sort of thing." What need to repeat the details of the old, old story ; what need to dwell on all the subtle indices which point to one inevitable result ? The sun and the sunflower, the "moon that draws the sea," and "the cloud that stoops from heaven and takes the shape," has not every simile been exhausted to illustrate the beautiful antique Legend of Love ? Only there be some children that blow bubbles, knowing well their instability and anticipating their collapse to nothingness with a sort of pensive scorn ; there be others who believe the exquisite phantom to be fashioned of enduring rock. The first inhalation of chloroform is as a foretaste of Paradise. It is only those who have partaken of it frequently who can prophecy the after-sensation of deadly sickness. Lady Diana, when she loved, and reaped happiness from her

love's indulgence, felt as one who assumes royal robes for a brief period, and whose shining crown surmounts sad foreseeing eyes which are ever fixed on the end. Azalea was as the imbecile, happy beyond the power of reason, who glories in the wreath of straw and circlet of beads, and has that sublime faith, the faith of ignorance, in these frail adornments of a visionary realm.

Captain Mowbray hunted very seldom now. "The country was too blind for anything," he said; and in truth autumn lingered this year, dilatory as a lover loth to bid his mistress farewell. To the horizon's verge the woods blushed red and brown, the wind held its breath, and the leaf that dropped did so in pure repletion of its life.

On one golden afternoon the sun shone on a pretty scene in the Auriel shrubberies.

A young man, and a girl still younger, sat on the trunk of a fallen beech. No

hatchet had thus prostrated the tree ; it had been rent in twain and flung to earth in some wild freak of the tempest. The sun fleckered patches of gold on to the girl's bare head, and on to the yet vivid ruddy beech-leaves. Wild flowers and long grasses, thrusting themselves up round the tree's sides, partly concealed her little feet. He and she supported between them a ponderous volume, with dusty edges. It had on its black sides a dingy inscription, which made believe to have once been written in gilt letters. The inscription told that the volume was a treatise on Illuminating Manuscripts, and that it belonged to Anselm Mowbray, a priestly scion of the house of Mowbray, who flourished A.D. 1600. Either the work was too interesting to be read quickly, or so dull that it was not read at all ; for the couple looking at it were so quiet that a furry bobtailed rabbit came out and cleaned his face before them. Over-ripe blossoms drifted slowly through the air : sometimes

they were caught on the bearded faces of tall grasses; here and there they rested on the hem of Azalea's dress. The bees kept up a hum of enjoyment over some late roses, or burrowed their brown bodies in the flowers' depths in an ecstasy of self-indulgence. Overhead, a bird sang out its appreciation of existence.

Presently Captain Mowbray twitched off the head of a rose, and gently placed it in his companion's hair. The thrush flew away at his movement; the insect tumbled out of its luscious recess; the rabbit scuttled away in a panic; but no other living thing was there to take note of the two.

Old Moore was slumbering away the hours by the fire in-doors—for the old, like infants, are perpetually relapsing into slumber, as though their hold of life were not a thing assured or certain. Robert Douglas sat brooding in his lonely cottage; withheld from going to Auriel—withheld from keeping the kindly watch over Azalea

he would have done over any other defenceless creature placed in a situation of peril,—because of his own painful consciousness. None so cowardly, none so chary of intrusion on the object beloved, as those proud hearts, which doubting of their welcome, suffer inexpressible bitterness in that doubt, yet dare not attempt to solve it. So there was no one to spoil the pretty tableau on the beech-tree, nor to overhear and repeat the words which presently stole into, rather than broke the silence.

“ My darling !”

My darling was rather a favourite expression of Captain Mowbray’s. Frequent use made it come glibly to his tongue ; he had applied it so often, to so many darlings, that it perchance had lost somewhat of its charm to him. But she at his side flushed and trembled, as the enchanted princess might have done at the sound of the magic word which transfigured her from stone into life.

"Then you do love me a little bit,  
Azalea ? Hang it, do speak !"

It is a pity that the language of the hero should have been so little in unison with the exquisite poetry of the scene ; but you see, only green caterpillars, and such like, assume the colour of what they subsist on. Azalea was in herself a breathing poem ; had she possessed lyric gifts, the delicate beauties of day and night—the glows and the mists, the trills and the pauses, the falling rain and the lapsing stars would have passed into her lay. She was amalgamated with nature. Captain Mowbray (to keep up the caterpillar comparison) had lived on barrack-rooms and clubs, furnished lodgings, cigars, betting-books, &c., &c. Had he been asked to describe the present scene in words, he would have said that it was "Awfully jolly, you know ; quite dry and warm ; no fear of catching cold, and the dearest little girl in the world to spoon on !"

I think Thurstan had somewhat degenerated mentally since the days when he was wild for love of Lady Diana ; there was now more of the barrack-room, and less of the fresh-hearted boy about him ; more of that false philosophy which some men think "good tone," and with which they glaze over their finer feelings, as painters obscure the lovely vivid tints of modern paintings, so that they may obtain a fashionable antique gloom. Not that Thurstan meant any harm in the present instance : he was thoroughly kind-hearted ; he would not have hurt a fly. If you think that I am presenting you with the hacknied picture of Faust and Marguerite you are mistaken. This girl attracted him. He believed that he loved her ; he designed no evil to her : at any rate it was very pleasant to see so fair a face flushing and paling under the fire of his eyes—she could never meet his eyes, and that amused him ; she talked in a quaint, thoughtful strain,

oddly at variance with her youthful appearance, and *that* amused him. He did not altogether understand her ; he thought her very odd, but very charming, nevertheless. He longed to kiss her again ; to take her in his arms as he had done that day when he saw her in the ferns ; but something in her innocence and defencelessness repulsed him more than the sharpest reproof would have done. He had referred more than once to that bygone episode ; and the girl had become so shy, had shown such genuine distress at the reminiscence, that he had not the heart to pursue the subject—only he sometimes found it very hard not to repeat the offence ; and on this especial day he felt himself tempted beyond the power of resistance ; hence he had, as he said, “broken covert.” He had asked Azalea if “she didn’t love him, just a little bit ?” and he was answered by that silence, more exquisite than words, which belongs to modesty—the proud modesty of seventeen

- which made the girl chary of any outspoken expression of her heart's secret.
- Captain Mowbray, better accustomed to women of the world always equal to every occasion, waxed impatient at her silence.
- “Do say you like me, Azalea.”
- Azalea counted mechanically the flecks of light that danced on a laurel-leaf, and was silent.
- “Then you don't care for me, and I suppose I had better go away, and never come here any more.”
- She paled visibly, and stole a glance at him half-piteous, half-fearful.
- “Why don't you speak, then?” he said, viciously annihilating a tall nettle which grew near his foot.
- Still no answer. It was foolish of her, but something in her foolishness flattered him more than the most consummate ease would have done.
- “Do you wish me to go?”
- “N-n-n-o.”

“Oh!”

He was at her feet in an instant; then in pity to her scared look, he only rested his lips on her little hands.

“My little darling!” he said, passionately, “I love you, and I long to kiss you; but never mind; I won’t without leave. I did it once before when you couldn’t help yourself, which was shabby of me; so now I’ll wait for your permission.”

And Thurstan sighed, and felt that he was heroically self-denying; but he would not consent to releasing her hands, but held them tightly, looking up in her face with an expression which methinks is not apt to fill a man’s eyes after the happy years of sweet and twenty. Sad and forty has thought in his gaze, even in the maddest delirium of pleasure; it’s only sweet and twenty who squanders his delight, believing it to be inexhaustible.

Fortunately lovers and children are rarely troubled by the shadows of the days to

come. The world is theirs, made only for them and their aspirations; their radiant happiness and their desperate anguish. Possibly these great gushes of occasional happiness—happiness so supreme as to defy calculation of sorrow—are sent to us in mercy, as a compensation for wounds which may pierce us hereafter; and the same mercy which sends the joy, sends blindness to prevent the happy eyes looking too closely into the future.

The bird which trilled out its rapturous conviction that life was all summer; the rabbit that nestled in the warm grass; the flowers that poured out unreservedly their gracious fragrance to the balmy air, and the girl listening to words which seemed to make her immortal (one of the treacherous effects produced by Love's torch, made of mud and hell-fire, being that the victims, when first scorched by its light, believe themselves to be transfigured into angels)—was it not well for all of these that they

could not foretell a season when the bird would fall starved in a snowdrift; the bud wither before an unkind wind; the rabbit die in the cruel girt of a snare, and the flame of love die out in dust and ashes?

Meanwhile the bust of the old Roman emperor, which towered on a pedestal behind the lovers, looked down on two faces inebriate with happiness. In his foolish pleasantry, Captain Mowbray flung rose-leaves up at the scarred marble semblance of Severus; while the girl leaned her sunny head against the inscription which told of the glories of an existence nearly seven centuries anterior to her own. The sun trembled awhile on the fragments of the marble wreath which encircled the emperor's head, then it burnt low towards the west, and left Severus and the lovers in shadow—a circumstance to which all three were equally indifferent. They strolled homewards at last, and it was not until they stood in the porch in that farewell

pause which indicates so much, that Thurstan suggested—

“Couldn’t you—wouldn’t you say good-night properly, Azalea ?”

He lowered the brown moustache to rather close proximity with her lips. For an instant she hesitated; and that hesitation was in itself a caress; but she pulled her hands free, and fled precipitately into the room, where Moore crooned over the fire in company with a blinking cat, on whom Topaz kept a wakeful eye of aggression.

Captain Mowbray waited an instant, on the chance of Azalea’s return; then he philosophically lit a cigar and walked away.

“Rum creatures women are,” he meditated; “they never run straight. Now, if I cared about any one enough to spend two or three hours in their company, I should *like* to kiss them.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FORBIDDEN FRUIT.

AZALEA stole to an upper window and watched Captain Mowbray disappear in the shadows of the avenue. Had he looked up he would have seen her face shrined in moonlit ivy leaves; but Thurstan was growing more prosaic every day of his life, and it never occurred to him that his game after flying from him should lurk and watch him under covert; so he vanished, leaving behind him a vague fragrance of cigar smoke, and Azalea descended to the sitting-room and mixed

old Moore's porridge and cut his bread and butter with an air of abstraction oddly at variance with Topaz's intense gaze, as, licking his lips rapidly, he glared at every gesture of her hands. Having appeased the dog, and attended to the wants of her foster-father, she relapsed into reverie.

She was very young, and in love for the first time, which may account for the supreme indifference she showed to her porridge. Captain Mowbray, on the other hand, thought a good deal, as he walked away, of the dinner which he expected to enjoy at Mr. Airdale's table, and recalled the tenderness of his host's home-bred Southdowns with genuine enthusiasm. Captain Mowbray always spent the bulk of his winter's leave at Mr. Airdale's: the latter and Thurstan's father had been bosom friends. Mr. Airdale had formerly rendered Mr. Mowbray valuable assistance; and as, by some mysterious process of reasoning which I do not pretend to explain, a man who has

befriended another is considered in some degree bound to everlasting repetitions of his kindness, thus Mr. Mowbray deemed it perfectly right and proper that his dear old friend Airdale should treat Thurstan as an adopted son. So when Thurstan's father proper rallied from the dangerous illness the news of which had summoned his son from Orme House, he suggested that " You mustn't lose your hunting, my dear boy. Airdale will take it unkindly if you cut him ; besides which, Thurstan, never stay away too long from any place where you desire to be welcome. You may get put on the shelf in your friend's memory as completely as though you were a set of disused harness. Friendships should be aired, like furs ; the moths get to them if they're put aside too long."

Hence it was that Captain Mowbray was located at Holme Park (Mr. Airdale's residence) some weeks before Lady Diana and the Ormes were due to arrive there.

It was also perhaps owing to Thurstan's being the only guest at Holme that he was so often thrown on his own resources for amusement, and ultimately found that mischief "for his idle hands" which Satan not unoften provides in the shape of a pretty face. Meanwhile Azalea is pensively regarding the moon, and old Moore is eating his supper.

"Who was that talking to you at the door?" Moore said, with a sudden flash of recollection of some indistinct murmur which had seemed to come from the porch. "Was it Douglas? It should have been Douglas; but why didn't he come in and say good-night?"

The old man's utterance was so confused now that it required a practised ear to understand his meaning. Azalea's intelligence was aided by her consciousness.

"It wasn't—Mr. Douglas," she stammered.

"It should have been Douglas," Moore

maundered. "Who else should walk so late with you?"

"It was Captain Mowbray—he to whom the place will belong," she explained. "You know who he is, daddy, don't you?"

Moore shook his head and looked at her fixedly. Then his eyes and his thoughts wandered off somewhere into the dim realms of imperfect reason.

"What is it—what is it vexing you, daddy?" the girl asked, caressing his hand. He touched her hair softly, and said, "It's like Mary's." Mary was his dead wife—long since forgotten by all excepting him; and even he only remembered her by fits and starts. Presently his thoughts reverted to his first question.

"I'm sure I heard some one whispering. Why don't you tell me who it was, Azalea? It's dreadful to hear things and not know what you're hearing. What were those people talking about?"

"It was Captain Mowbray and myself,"

Azalea said, distressed at his manner, which seemed to be more than usually confused this night.

“I don’t like it—I don’t like it. He’s too young and too handsome, and you’re too young and too handsome. Harm will come of it. I shall see him, Azalea. You must ask him to come to me. I shall tell him to go away.”

Not observing how blank the girl’s face grew at this suggestion, he went on: “I shall be happy then, dear. I’m so afraid he might harm you; and I’m not strong enough to help you. My hands have no power, Azalea, and I feel weak as a new-born babe.” He cried a little as he lifted his hands feebly, in illustration of his weakness.

He required more support than usual as he went up to bed, and the girl’s slender frame was scarcely equal to the task of upholding him. She felt uneasy about him, and did not leave him until he had

fallen asleep; then, somewhat reassured by the regularity of his breathing and the benign calm of his face, she retreated to her own bedroom, and, having prayed for her foster-father, fell asleep with a smile on her lips, thinking of her lover.

The next morning Douglas came once more to Auriel. He had kept away two or three days, and Azalea, though she commented on his absence, scarcely regretted it. He had become so stern—almost savage in his manner—so abrupt and bitter, that, without seeking to account to herself for his conduct, she shrank from him; and the face of the younger man seemed brighter and more goodly in her sight when contrasted with the other's fierce grey eyes and frowning brow. On this morning Douglas did not linger with Moore as had been his habit ere seeking Azalea. He inquired for her at once, and hearing from old Sally that "Miss had gone to the apple-loft," he followed her thither, walk-

ing quickly, with a restless look in his face unlike its usual dark calm.

"I am come to bid you good-bye," he said abruptly, when he found himself with her whom he sought.

*Azaléa* was indemnifying herself for her previous fast by a raid on her favourite fruit. With a half-eaten apple in one hand, with the other upholding an apronful of the apple's compatriots, she sat in the doorway of the loft, her feet resting on one of the upper bars of the ladder, her hair blown by the wind and bright with sunlight. Douglas, as he looked up at her face, thought that it was like to a star painted on a background of shadows.

"I am going away," he pursued, "for some time."

Such a yearning, wistful face it was that was upturned to hers. It was the melancholy reflection of a heart darkened by hopeless aspirations. He looked at her

searchingly, but could find no trace of concern on her countenance—only surprise.

“Going away!” she echoed. “Going to leave Auriel for some time! What will poor daddy do without you?”

He lowered his face, that she might not see his visible disappointment; for there is a depth even lower than hopelessness.

“I shall be back as soon as possible,” he said presently. “You must tell Moore so, and explain to him the cause of my absence. I have no time to do so myself. There is a man whom I once knew—a comrade in my old haphazard life at the Cape. When I last saw him he was a model of manhood—tall, strong, gay, and combative. I hear of him now as a cripple, worn out by sickness and privation. He is dying in an attic in London. He begged his way to this country to seek a relative, and has found a blank. The brother was dead, and now I am the only person in this country to whom he is not an utter stranger.”

"Poor man!" Azalea said softly. "I am glad you are going. I wish I could send him something." She looked wistfully at the fruit in her lap, then at a little gold cross she wore suspended by a ribbon round her throat.

Douglas half smiled as he divined her tender thought. "Apples are scarcely appropriate diet for the sick; and your cross—it was your mother's, was it not?—need not be sacrificed to minister to his wants. You can only give him your prayers, Azalea. Good-bye."

He held out his hand and grasped hers. As he looked at her the pain of his impending departure seemed intolerable. It was all he could do to restrain himself from taking her in his arms and crying, "Love me! for pity's sake give me back a grain from my all!" As he lingered, a footstep broke the silence, and Azalea, looking up with a vivid flush on her face, withdrew every thought from Douglas, his intended

journey, and its object, and was conscious only that the delicious new emotion in her life was before her, personified by the handsome smiling young man who seemed in such perfect accord with the bright beauty of the morning.

Douglas looked at the pair in silence for a moment; then, releasing Azalea's hand and nodding to Mowbray, he turned to go.

"Halloo! where are you off to?" Thurstan said, pleasantly.

"I am going to town, and am on my way to the station; will you come a few steps with me?" Douglas answered, after a short pause.

"Shall be delighted; Miss Moore, I'll be back directly and have a go-in at the apples. If you go away, don't lock the door."

The elder man, moody and preoccupied, the younger one cheerful and unconcerned, went a few yards without speaking; Thurstan whistling a tune and swinging

his cane, Douglas walking with his eyes downcast, as one who takes no pleasure in the brightness of day—not even the unconscious animal delight which makes a bird's trill fuller, a boy's eyes merrier, for the joy of a gracious morning. When they had arrived at the end of the avenue, Douglas stopped.

"Mowbray," he said, abruptly, "you were once kind enough to say you'd do anything for me that lay in your power."

"So I would, old fellow," the other answered, heartily.

Douglas hesitated; then, without looking at his companion, said slowly—

"I wish you would hunt more, and look at books and pictures less; pursuing a fox is a better day's work than hunting down a soul. A pupil of Lady Diana Merton's will scarce believe in a woman's innocence. At least respect Azalea's ignorance. She is alone and unprotected; hitherto she has known neither evil nor unhappiness. Nature

has been kind to her, and engrafted her in a solitude. Promise me, Mowbray, that you will not harm a thing so defenceless; there are plenty of women in the modern Babylon yonder whom you can scarcely injure by your attentions: honour this one by your neglect."

"I mean her no harm," Thurstan said, reflectively. He began to feel sorry he had gone so far in his flirtation; he was loth to admit the extent of his folly to this stern, anxious-faced man. He was not prepared either to give up Azalea or to retain her in the only fashion likely to be palateable to her friends.

"You mean no harm!" Douglas echoed, bitterly; "I dare say not. The schoolboy means no harm when he tortures a brood of birds while the mother hovers near the desecrated nest in impotent agony. The woman means no harm who turns an honest man into a devil. People who 'mean no harm' are the accomplices in

every crime. What does it matter what the intention was, when the result is a life destroyed or a soul warped ? Leave these evil tricks to women, Mowbray ; men should be above treachery. Let this girl be ; she and her old father are the only friends I have on earth."

"I wish you wouldn't come down on a fellow so sharp," Captain Mowbray said, uncomfortably. "I not only don't mean, but won't do any harm ; will that content you ? I am going to town shortly for a few days, and I will take that opportunity of slackening the intimacy a little—let her down easy, in fact."

" You be d——d !" muttered Douglas, under his breath.

" Eh ! what did you say ?" asked his unconscious companion.

" I only wished to know when you were going ?"

" Very soon : the fact is Lady Di. is in town, and——"

“What!” cried Douglas, in a tone of mingled scorn and wonder, “do you mean to say that cheat has still any delusion for you?”

“Did not Samson find Delilah lovely even to the third treachery?” the younger man said, smiling; then, with a change of manner, he took Douglas’s hand.

“I will lay to heart what you have said. I confess it won’t be easy; but I know it’s best for her, and I owe you something. You may be easy in your mind. I give you my word Azalea shall meet no dishonourable treatment at my hands. After I have been gone a week she will probably forget my existence. Good-bye.”

“How she would hate me,” thought Douglas, as he turned his steps towards the high road, “did she know that mine was the hand to break down the web!”

Yet his heart felt lighter than it had done for many days past. Love and selfishness are incompatible.

Reason said, “It is for her sake.”

His heart confessed, "It is for mine."

Meanwhile Captain Mowbray returned to the apple-house, where Azalea was still perched high up against the ivied wall. For a while he was silent and passive, and stood at the foot of the ladder meditatively pulling his moustache. Then he looked up at the girl and sighed—much such a sigh as a child might give when put on his parole not to touch forbidden dainties. She looked prettier than usual, he thought; but what pleasure does not seem at its sweetest when it must perforce be resigned? He wished there were no such things as morals, nor convenances, nor any other of the awkward impediments which stood in the way of selfish desires. He wished he lived in the days of shepherds and shepherdesses, and all those sort of people. No one ever heard of a mother shepherdess, nor of an ancient shepherd, playing the part of guardian to the youthful Doris; no one made themselves

disagreeable about the honour or dishonour of Strephon's intentions. Life was then made up of green pastures, young lambs, crooks, straw hats, and osculation *ad libitum*.

It is to be doubted whether Captain Mowbray, rendered fastidious by an excellent mess-table cuisine, would have tolerated the lamb without mint-sauce, or the pasture without a Fortnum and Mason basket to unpack on it; but these trifles escaped his consideration; he was possessed by one idea.

Here was a pretty girl who he felt sure loved him—(men feel sure on these subjects much sooner than women do, although we are accredited with the greater share of vanity)—and he would like very much to take her in his arms and say how “awfully fond he was of her, and now he had as good as promised he would throw her over.” How on earth was he to explain his change of manner? It was only yesterday he had said he loved her, and now he

was going away to leave her for good and all—and he had never had that kiss! He went a few steps up the ladder, and asked her to throw him some fruit.

She held out a basketful, and the contact of her bare round arm with his sleeve brought him yet a few steps nearer to her. He had found it difficult to retain his coolness of manner when he was at the foot of the ladder; now the difficulty apparently became impossibility; for when he found himself opposite the lovely face, he suddenly flung down the apples, and, forgetting all his resolutions, kissed her.

A spider which had dropped down a long way from home into the sunlight, to have a spree amongst the flies, coiled itself rapidly back into the shadow as Captain Mowbray rustled the ivy bough in his ascent; a bird flew twittering from under the eaves; a few red leaves from the Virginian creeper fell from the stem, caught fire an instant in a sunbeam, and then flut-

tered down to rot in mould. Only Azalea was motionless ; and on her was the hush of a great shame. But when he lowered his face to her hand (for at the tender touch of her innocent lips boldness melted into a softer feeling), and craved pardon for his offence ; when he said that he loved her—that she must forgive him—that he was a d----d good-for-nothing scoundrel ; that he must leave her—it was best so ; but he loved her dearly, and might he kiss her once more before he said good-bye for good and all,—when he poured out all this with a sort of rough eloquence Azalea only partially understood his meaning. She did not comprehend the vague self-accusation, or the shadowy allusion to his departure. She heard distinctly, “ I love you ! I love you ! ” and then the sense of shame gave place to another feeling impossible to analyse. It was joy—shy, like a child’s, but intense as a woman’s : a joy so ineffably sweet in its mysteriousness, so vivid in its quality, that

she would fain have put out her hands and stopped this golden hour in its progress. Why did not the bird stay its flight, the leaf rest on the bough, the insect hang motionless in mid-air? Why did not all nature pause in sympathy with the charm by which she was spell-bound?

A better educated young lady would have been troubled by none of these complex emotions. Amelia Orme would have looked down at the right moment, because it would be *en règle* so to do; she might also essay a blush, unless she were "got up" to look pallid for the day. She would on no account have permitted her wooer to disturb her evenly-arranged chignon. A gentle pressure of the hand might be allowable, for *that* couldn't come off, but as for this heart tumult—this perturbed sense of mystery—she was too well trained to experience the first; while as to the second, the march of female progress, and the manners of the

times leave very few mysteries unelucidated by the modern town-bred damsel.

What could have been expected of this creature, who was little better than a dryad, than that she should sit motionless in the autumn haze, and think that all the world should turn to gold like the beech, and hold its big breath with her trance !

Captain Mowbray took a more practical and ordinary view of what to him was a not uncommon event.

“ What a fool I am ! ” he said to himself, ruefully, as he walked back to Holme that afternoon ; “ I might have known I shouldn’t keep my word. But what a charming little mouth it is—who could injure such a pretty child ? The devil of it is, that I’ve promised to go there again to-morrow.”

END OF VOL. II.







